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living head like Heaven is bent.
but enduring monument

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THE PILGRIM OF ETERNITY

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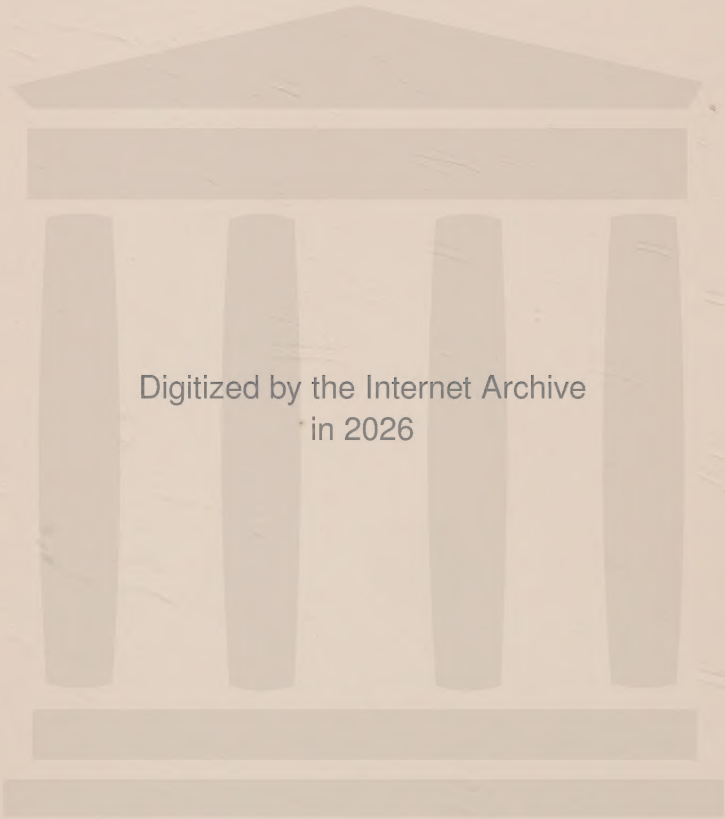
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Byron in 1818.
By G. H. Harlow.

THE PILGRIM OF ETERNITY

BYRON—A CONFLICT

BY

JOHN DRINKWATER

"THE PILGRIM OF ETERNITY, WHOSE FAME
OVER HIS LIVING HEAD LIKE HEAVEN IS BENT,
AN EARLY BUT ENDURING MONUMENT. . . ."

Shelley's Adonais

NEW YORK
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TO
THE LORD ERNLE

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PREFACE

EVERY writer of biography or critical memoirs has to face the certainty that, as to a great deal of his detail, he would be challenged by his subject. I do not claim to have read everything that has been written about Byron, but I have read everything known to be written by him, and have examined all the original sources of information about his life that I could find. Which, in the aggregate, amounts to something over twenty thousand pages. The attempt to compose a coherent figure from such a mass of material, in a single volume, is a delightful task; but one inevitably attended by the certainty to which I have just referred. But while Byron, if it were possible to think of him as reading this book, would certainly score its margins with queries and exclamations, I cannot but hope that he would, after all, feel that at least it has been inspired by an essential sympathy for which he would forgive its errors. That, it seems to me, is the highest aspiration that the writer of such a work can indulge, and, perhaps, the only one that is worth indulging.

The sources are as follows:

For general biographical information:

Letters and Journals of Lord Byron. By Thomas Moore. 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1830.)

The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals. Edited by Rowland E. Prothero. 6 vols. (London: Murray, 1898-1901.)

The Works of Lord Byron. Edited by William Ernest Henley. [Vol I only issued.] (London: Heinemann, 1897.)

Lord Byron's Correspondence. Chiefly with Lady Melbourne, etc. Edited by John Murray. 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1922.)

A Journey through Albania and Other Provinces of Turkey in

Europe and Asia during the years 1809 *and* 1810. By J. C. Hobhouse. 2 vols. (London: Cawthorn, 1813.)

Recollections of a Long Life. By Lord Broughton (John Cam Hobhouse). Edited by Lady Dorchester. 8 vols. (London: Murray, 1909, and following years.)

Recollections of the Life of Lord Byron, from the Year 1808 *to the end of* 1814. By the late R. C. Dallas, Esq. (London: Colburn, 1824.)

The Diary of Dr. John William Polidori. 1816. Edited by William Michael Rossetti. (London: Elkin Mathews, 1911.)

Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron . . . in the Years 1821 *and* 1822. By Thomas Medwin, Esq. (London: Colburn, 1824.)

Conversations of Lord Byron with the Countess of Blessington. (London: Colburn, 1824.)

A New Edition. With a Contemporary Sketch and a Memoir of Lady Blessington. (London: Bentley, 1893.) Also *The Idler in Italy.* By the Same. 3 vols. London and 1 vol. Paris, 1829.

Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries. By Leigh Hunt. [The Second Edition, with a new Preface.] (London: Colburn, 1828.)

The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt. 3 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, 1850.)

My Recollections of Lord Byron. (English translation of the Countess Guiccioli's *Lord Byron jugé par les témoins de sa Vie.*) (London: and New York, 1869.)

Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron. By E. J. Trelawny. (London: Moxon, 1858.)

Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author. By Edward John Trelawny. [A New Edition.] 2 vols. (London: Pickering, 1878.)

The Life of Lord Byron. By John Galt, Esq. (London: Colburn, Bentley, 1830.)

The Real Lord Byron. By John Cordy Jeaffreson. 2 vols. (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1833.)

Last Links with Byron, Shelley, and Keats. By William Graham. (London: Smithers, 1898.)

A Publisher and His Friends. Memoir and Correspondence of the Second John Murray. By Samuel Smiles. A New Edition. Edited by Thomas Mackay. (London: Murray, 1911.) (First published in 1891.)

For further information as to Byron's marriage and separation:

Contemporary Account of the Separation of Lord and Lady Byron. Also of the Destruction of Lord Byron's Memoirs. By the Right Hon. Lord Broughton. (London: Privately printed, 1870.) Reissued in *Recollections of a Long Life.* Vols. II and III.

Lady Byron Vindicated. A History of the Byron Controversy. By Harriet Beecher Stowe. (London: Sampson Low, 1870.)

Medora Leigh. Edited by Charles Mackay. (London: Bentley, 1869.)

Vindication of Lady Byron. [By John Fox.] (London: Bentley, 1871.)

Astarte. A Fragment of Truth concerning George Gordon Byron, Sixth Lord Byron. Recorded by his Grandson, Ralph Milbanke, Earl of Lovelace. (London: Printed at the Chiswick Press, 1905.)

A New Edition. With Many Additional Letters. Edited by Mary Countess of Lovelace. (London: Christophers, 1921.)

Lord Byron and His Detractors. (Papers by Lord Ernle, John Murray, and an Anonymous Writer. Printed for the Roxburgh Club, 1906.)

The Byron Mystery. By Sir John C. Fox. (London: Grant Richards, 1924.)

For further information as to the last nine months of Byron's life:

Conversations on Religion with Lord Byron and Others. By the late James Kennedy, M.D. (London: Murray, 1830.)

Greece in 1823 *and* 1824. By Colonel Leicester Stanhope. (London: Sherwood, 1824.)

A New Edition, to which are added Reminiscences of Lord Byron. 1825.

Narrative of a Second Visit to Greece. Including Facts connected with the last Days of Lord Byron. By Edward Blaquière, Esq. (London: Whittaker, 1825.)

Memoirs of the Affair of Greece. With Various Anecdotes Relating to Lord Byron, and An Account of his Last Illness and Death. By Julius Millingen. (London: Rodwell, 1831.)

A Narrative of Lord Byron's Last Journey to Greece. Ex-

tracted from the Journal of Count Peter Gamba. (London: Murray, 1825.)

The Last Days of Lord Byron. By William Parry. (London: Knight and Lacey, 1825.)

Byron painted by His Compeers. As Given in the Various Newspapers of his Day. (London: Palmer, 1869.)

These works, it need not be said, differ greatly in value, from the authoritative importance of Moore down to the odd phrase or two that we accept from Graham. Most of them receive separate attention in the body of this book. When, as constantly happens, there are two, or many, versions of the same circumstances, I have chosen that which to me was the most convincing, unless it seemed necessary to give more than one.

Among other works more or less contemporary with Byron are *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Lord Byron.* By George Clinton, Esq. (London: Robins, 1828), which starts well with an admirable description of the quarrel between the mad Lord Byron and Mr. Musters, but collapses into a seven-hundred-page anthology of Byron's works, with only once or twice an illuminating remark, as this of Fletcher—"as faithful and as foolish a servant as man ever had"; *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Right Honourable Lord Byron.* [By John Watkins.] (London: Colburn, 1822), to which further reference is made; and *The Life, Writings, Opinions, and Times* [*etc.*] *of Lord Byron.* By an English Gentleman in the Greek Military Service. (London: Iley, 1825), an unauthorised attempt in three volumes to anticipate Moore.

For the study of Byron's poetry *The Works of Lord Byron.* Poetry. Edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge. 7 vols. (London: Murray, 1898-1904), is an essential work, though it has frequently been convenient to consult the first or early editions. Among the early critics of Byron as a poet, Jeffrey and Gifford are important in their respective Reviews; but Galt, as is said later, has his points, and Sir Egerton Brydges in *Letters on the Character and Poetical Genius of Lord Byron.* By Sir Egerton Brydges, Bart. (London: Longman, 1824), and *An Impartial Portrait of Lord Byron.* By Sir Egerton Brydges, Bart. (Paris:

Galignani, 1825), reminds us of an extremely well-informed and intelligent enthusiast of poetry who has far less reputation to-day than he deserves.

Recent books on Byron, other than those of documentary importance, I have, in general, for obvious reasons, avoided. I remember that I admired Miss Ethel Colburn Mayne's book when it appeared thirteen years ago, but I have refrained from looking at it since. To Mr. Richard Edgcumbe and Mr. Harold Nicolson, however, I trust I have made adequate acknowledgments elsewhere.

A great number of memoirs contain incidental references to Byron that are valuable. Among these may be mentioned *Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence of Thomas Moore.* Edited by Lord John Russell. 8 vols. (London: Longman, 1853-1856); *Memoir of the Rev. Francis Hodgson, B.D.* By his son, the Rev. James T. Hodgson. 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1878); particularly in respect of Augusta Leigh; *Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers.* By Alexander Dyce. (London: Rogers, 1887); *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott.* 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Douglas, 1890); and the Memoirs and Letters of Hannah More, Mary Russell Mitford, Keats, Trelawny, and Shelley. Edward Dowden's *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley.* 2 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, 1886), is a necessary authority on the association between the two poets. Of books that rank as Byroniana, such as *Anecdotes of Lord Byron.* (London: 1825), *Byroniana* [*etc.*] *With the Parish Clerk's Album.* (London, 1834), and *Narrative of Lord Byron's Voyage to Corsica and Sardinia* [*etc.*]. (London, 1824), there could be made an almost interminable list.

It goes without saying that any one in these days who writes about an Englishman is under a continual obligation to the *Dictionary of National Biography.*

My personal thanks are due for many kindnesses. Lady Airlie has graciously allowed me to make what use I like of the chapters in her *In Whig Society*, 1775-1818. By Mabell, Countess of Airlie. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1921), that throw new light on Byron, Caroline Lamb, and Miss Milbanke. Lord Ernle, who has placed every student of Byron under a debt not to be

measured, has given me the most kindly encouragement in this work. By the courtesy of the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres I have been allowed to examine the papers in his family archives dealing with Lord Lindsay and his participation in the controversy of 1869. Mr. Thomas J. Wise, with the generosity so well known to his friends, has placed at my disposal the manuscript journals of Clare Clairmont, in his possession. I have had courteous assistance from Mr. W. E. Doubleday and Mr. W. A. Briscoe, librarians respectively of the Hampstead Central Library and the Nottingham Public Library, in inspecting the valuable Byron collections under their charge. Mr. Briscoe I have also to thank for other attentions, not the least of which was an introduction to the late Mr. H. C. Roe's Byron collection, through the courtesy of Mrs. Roe. Mr. Edward Marsh has read my manuscript, much to its advantage, and I offer him my grateful thanks. Adjoining the list of illustrations will be found notes of their sources and of my obligations with regard to them. Finally, I should like to thank Mr. John Murray, if he will allow me to do so, not for specific favours, though these I know would have been granted had there been occasion to ask for them, but for the liberal way in which he has carried on the traditions of his house as Byron's publisher. The great edition of Byron's works which he has sponsored is an honour to English poetry, and, while it is no more than Byron's due, dues are not often so handsomely paid.

J. D.

London,
July 1925.

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NOTE ON ILLUSTRATIONS

THE frontispiece is taken from a lithograph to which reference is made on page 283.

The picture by Sanders is to be found in the second volume of Moore's *Life*, 1830.

The cartoon from *The Tomahawk* is referred to in the text.

The View of Harrow School is taken from *Savillon's Elegies*, a book of poems published by "A Gentleman" in 1795.

Messrs. Berry Bros. & Co., of 3 St. James's Street, have a record of a unique kind in their registers of the weights of famous men and (occasionally) women, going back to 1765. It is by their kindness that I am able to reproduce here the pages containing the entries relating to Byron, Hobhouse, Matthews, and Moore. And I should like especially to thank Mr. F. L. Berry for the courtesy with which he has enabled me to garner this scrap of London history from premises that are a part of it.

The print of Childe Harold is taken from Clinton's *Memoirs* of Byron, published in 1828. It is not signed.

Mr. Max Beerbohm has very kindly given me leave to use his drawing, and Messrs. Heinemann and Co., the publishers of *The Poet's Corner*, have confirmed this permission. My thanks are also due to Mr. Philip Guedalla, for allowing the reproduction to be made from the original drawing which belongs to him.

The original of Augusta Leigh's letter from which the facsimile is taken is in my possession.

Of the originals of the portraits in Plate VII and VIII, those of Mrs. Byron and Caroline Lamb belong to Mr. John Murray, that of Lady Oxford to the National Portrait Gallery, that of Lady Byron to the Earl of Lovelace's family, and that of Lady Blessington to the Hertford House Collection. That of Mary Chaworth is recorded by Lord Ernle as belonging to Mrs. Chaworth Musters; that of Augusta Leigh was in the collection of the

late Mr. H. C. Roe, and now belongs to Mrs. Roe. Those of Clare Clairmont and the Countess Guiccioli belong to I know not whom. The portrait of Lady Frances Webster appeared in *La Belle Assemblée* for December 1811. If permission to reproduce any of these portraits, most of which are familiar, should have been obtained beyond this acknowledgment, may I ask the proprietors to accept this apology? The portrait of Lady Melbourne, which I think has not hitherto been reproduced, is the property of Lord Walter Kerr, who very kindly allows me to use it here.

In Plate X there is a portrait of Captain John Byron, the poet's father. This print is the property of the Central Public Library at Nottingham. Mr. Briscoe, the librarian, in sending me the print and permission to use it, informs me that he has no doubt as to its authenticity, but that he is unable to trace its source. The original of the portrait of John Murray belongs to the present head of the house, and that of the Hobhouse portrait to Lady Dorchester. The portraits of Leigh Hunt and Moore are taken from Hunt's *Byron* and Moore's *Memoirs* respectively, that of the Prince Regent from Rogers's *Table Talk*, and the original of the Shelley portrait belongs to the Bodleian Library. Again I trust that this note discharges whatever acknowledgments are due.

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THE PILGRIM OF ETERNITY

INTRODUCTION

"I have been asked by some if his appearance and manner did not convey the idea of a fiend incarnate."

—Dr. Kennedy.

1

Byron has been the occasion of more squabbling than any other figure in our literary history. To write of him seems to be, in some inevitable measure, to scold. Indeed, from the first, to have known him or his affairs has been to fall into some quarrel or another. When he was an infant his parents separated, and, upon his father's request that he should still see something of his child, the young Byron was taken to him for a night, and bawled so effectively that his disillusioned sire surrendered all his claims forthwith. At his infant school he fought other little boys, as was natural, and fell out with his masters and his nurse. At the age of eight he was taken to the theatre, and from his seat denounced the actor of Petruchio for bullying Katherine, crying out at a famous passage, "But I say it is the moon, sir." Throughout his boyhood he lived in a state of constant and often violent conflict with his mother, who was of a nature to provoke a far less spirited son to desperation. At Harrow he was on more than one occasion the centre if not the cause of a school crisis, and at Cambridge he set his tradesmen and his lawyer by the ears, and scandalised the high table of his college by telling them that his pugilistic friend, Gentleman Jackson, could teach them manners. These incidents are amusing at a distance, but they had fire enough in them and some venom at the time. And they were the prelude to a history that has been a stern trial to the temper of everybody who has come within its process.

Byron's first book of poems provoked as stupid an attack—in *The Edinburgh Review*—as could well be made upon the

work of a youth, and the attack was in turn repaid by as crushing a retort as ever came from an apprentice in satire. *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, whatever its merits and demerits may have been, at least taught the pundits that a very dangerous young plaintiff was standing at their judgment-seat. Thereafter the conflict went steadily, or convulsively, forward. Byron left England for the first time chiefly, it must be supposed, to escape maternal scenes, and his early travels through Greece and Albania, full of adventure, were perhaps the most equable passage of his life, though even then he breathes a sigh of relief when his travelling companion and one of his staunchest friends, John Cam Hobhouse, leaves him. He returned to England and to the intoxicating fame that descended on him with the publication of the first cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage;* and then he married. Of this marriage a great deal more will necessarily have to be said, but it may at once be remarked that no human alliance has ever provoked more bitterness and malice, reverberating to the third and fourth generations. Lady Byron astonished her husband, as she has astonished history, by a line of conduct that, right or wrong, has baited the wits of her accusers and her apologists alike ever since. Byron himself, who during the critical negotiations behaved, greatly to the vexation of some of his subsequent defamers, uncommonly like a gentleman, once the separation was an accomplished fact too often seasoned what remorse he felt with kindling vituperation. Thereafter the Byron question, or the Byron "mystery," was nearly always approached with some violence of mood even by unsensational minds. Hobhouse at the time left, as we shall see, a detailed account of the case as he knew it, and already so cool and precise an intelligence as his finds it difficult not to overstep the mark of prudence in exposing what he plainly takes to be a discreditable conspiracy. Later investigators have been less considerate.

When the first wrath of the scandal had spent itself, little was heard of it, save occasional dark undertones in society, for a generation. But in 1870, when Byron had been dead forty-five years and Lady Byron nine, Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and other less celebrated books, published

a *History of the Byron Controversy*, in which she claimed, on the evidence of an interview with Lady Byron, to prove beyond further question the most damaging of the charges against Byron. That she did nothing of the kind will be shown in another place; for, however far short she comes of her intention, she does advance testimony that has to be considered. But the point to be noted here is the way in which that testimony is presented. Mrs. Stowe had, and probably still has, a reputation for philanthropic and domestic virtue. Her book on the Byrons is easily one of the most nauseating essays in sanctimony that has ever been written. Persuaded to her task with shuddering reluctance, as she tells us, in the cause of truth and loyalty to a dead friend, she turns over the muck-heap of her own emotions with a self-satisfaction that is revolting. When her style, which is execrable, is challenged, she exclaims, "Are the cries of the oppressed, the gasps of the dying, the last prayers of mothers—are *any* words wrung like drops of blood from the human heart to be judged as literary efforts?" She calls Byron "obscene beyond what even their most drunken tolerance could at first endure," she calls him "savage, brutal, drunken, cruel," she tells us that his life-long object was to use "every talent that he possessed" for the "one particular purpose of vilifying and defaming his wife," incidentally making "death and hell elegantly easy for other young men." And much more to the same effect. She expatiates on his "filthy, ghastly writings," which were "justly considered an insult to a Christian community." Sometimes she curbs herself, remembering to rejoice with Lady Byron "that God had not utterly forsaken him," since "remorse always showed moral sensibility, and, while *that* remained, there was always hope." Mrs. Stowe's pen might have faltered a little discouragingly as she wrote of Moore that his "vice was cautious, soft, seductive, slippery, and covered at times with a thin, tremulous veil of religious sentimentalism"; but she has no misgivings. Sometimes she admits Byron's gifts, but with close moral caution; the fourth canto of *Childe Harold* is "a monument of what sacred and solemn powers God gave to this wicked man, and how vilely he abused that power to slay the innocent." For the rest she oscillates between horror of

him and revivalist ecstasy for his wife, to whom she so often and so touchingly refers as the widow. Stoutly she demands, "If the peeress *as a wife* has no rights, what is the state of the cotter's wife?"; and again, "Might there not properly have been an indignant protest of family solicitors against the insult to the person and character of the Baroness Wentworth? . . . so pure was she, so childlike, so artless, so loving . . . that a memorial of her is like the relic of a saint. And could not all this preserve her grave from insult? O England, England!" Two more samples of Mrs. Stowe's manner will suffice. This is of Ada, the one child of the Byron marriage: "She married a man of fashion, ran a brilliant course as a gay woman of fashion, and died early of a lingering and painful disease. In the . . . sick-room, the daughter came back wholly to her mother's arms and heart; and it was on that mother's bosom that she leaned as she went down into the dark valley. It was that mother who placed her weak and dying hand in that of her Almighty Saviour." So can holy things be defiled. And finally, "In all the storm and obloquy and rebuke that has raged in consequence of my speaking, I have had two unspeakable sources of joy; first, that they could not touch *her*, and second, that they could not blind the all-seeing God." In which paroxysm of virtue we may leave the lady.

The specific evidence given in Mrs. Stowe's book must, I say, be considered elsewhere. She would not be worth so much attention here on other grounds were it not that she affords a striking example of the grosser faults of taste and temper that have beset the discussion of Byron. In the same category must be placed Lord Lovelace, with his ineffably misconceived publication of *Astarte* (1905). Here, again, is evidence that has to be dealt with once it has been put forward; but while Lord Lovelace is a far abler writer than Mrs. Stowe, and has a much more imposingly documented story to tell, his folly seems to be even more gratuitous. I hope that in making these strictures I shall not for my own part be accused of an offence against the peace. To protest against brawling in the street is not to be a brawler oneself. Lord Lovelace should not have published his book.

Mrs. Stowe was muddle-headed, steeped in spiritual vanity, a prey to moral hysteria; but she had some excuse for the intention of her book, if none for its effect. She did persuade herself that she alone possessed a secret that must be told for her friend's sake, and the indignation which she in fact so warmly enjoyed might have been legitimately aroused by some of the viler imputations then recently made against Lady Byron, as when *Blackwood* called her a "moral Brinvilliers" (emending thus "The moral Clytemnestra of her lord" [1]), which itself was a pretty display of intemperance on the other side; Brinvilliers being an accomplished poisoner who was devoted to religion and charity, and nursed her victims, among them her father, her sister, and two brothers, with assiduous care. But Lord Lovelace had no such provocation, either of circumstance or temperament. We are to presume from his own statement that, being the trustee into whose hands Lady Byron's papers had descended, he was impelled at long last to place before the world just such positive evidence as would fix the alleged crime on his grandfather's name for ever, and absolve Lady Byron from the sundry calumnies that had been brought against her. This must, one supposes, in any case have been an extremely painful duty, but if it had to be discharged, then clearly the only appropriate way of doing this would be to say as much as would make the necessary information public, and no word more. Further, it would seem clear that this was the worst possible occasion upon which to confuse explicit evidence, the production of which was the sole justification possible for speaking at all, with personalities. Lord Lovelace was to give the world certain conclusive documents that had hitherto been withheld from public knowledge. He must, by the obligations of his position, do this with finality and with scrupulous dignity.

He did neither. The evidence set out in *Astarte* has been ably examined by an anonymous legal writer in a paper published for the Roxburgh Club. This writer, it is true, leaves Byron's character in general considerably worse (if we follow his moral direction, which we do not) than he found it. Indeed at times

[1] Lines on Hearing that Lady Byron was Ill.

he almost rivals Mrs. Stowe herself in motions of the spirit, though we see what we take to be a somewhat maladroit design in his admissions. In any case he does very effectively impeach Lord Lovelace's evidence, certainly to the extent of removing it from that area of final conviction in which it was his lordship's bounden duty to fix it if he gave it at all. This evidence, with the rest, will be examined later. But on the score of personal dignity Lord Lovelace's part in *Astarte* is wholly lamentable. Opening from the position that any interest in Byron and his affairs is, in any one but the poet's family, an ill-bred impertinence,[1] he proceeds to an exhibition of strangely assorted Billingsgate and snobbery. John Murray is repeatedly "one-eyed M" (after Hazlitt), a tradesman, the *Quarterly* his "trade circular," his business one of the "filthy manufactories of spurious literature." Gifford is "lame G" (Hazlitt again) "the informer," Moore a large number of obnoxious things, some of which are designated elsewhere,[2] and of them and their kind collectively Lord Lovelace says, "The wonder is that any fragments from a Noble Poet to his attendant servilities should have been over the level of the creeping things to which he wrote." He throws out random charges of thieving and duplicity against Byron's publishers and editors, and makes it clear that he does not wish to be contaminated by dealings with any of them. The present Mr. John Murray has exposed his Lordship's inaccuracies about "one-eyed M" (who lost an eye by an accident at school) by plain documentary evidence; and further by convicting him out of his own mouth of very serious misrepresentations made in *Astarte* about recent literary relations concerning Byron, inclines us to receive any statement made or opinion expressed in that unfortunate book with the greatest caution.[3] But again our point is, for the moment, that Byron once more betrayed a critic into neglect of the common decencies of controversy.

Nor has the vehemence of temper about Byron attended only the question of his marriage. His name and his affairs have

[1] This view is dealt with at p. 42.
[2] P. 175.
[3] In *The Monthly Review,* reprinted in the Roxburgh Club publication above mentioned, *Lord Byron and His Detractors,* 1906.

been a cue for wrangling in almost any connection. His poetry itself has always incited criticism to the most eloquent extremes of eulogy and censure, and has perhaps more than any other in English arrested the attention, pleased or reproachful, of the man in the street. His conduct during his life, even apart from his alleged major transgression, was a delight to his detractors and an embarrassment to his friends, and after his death continued to exercise the solicitude of both. The news of his death, which took place at Missolonghi, April 19th, 1824, arrived in England on May 14th, and three days later was enacted one of the most fantastic scenes in the history of literature. Six honourable and shrewd men then spent most of the day scuttling from one house to another in a frenzy of argument as to whether the manuscript of the dead poet's autobiography should or should not be destroyed, which after much recrimination, whining, and high-flown sentiment, it was. Whereupon for another fortnight the six fell to explaining each other away, both privately and in the public prints. This remarkable incident will engage our further attention, but a bare reference to it is in place here.

One more fragment of history may be given in illustration of the stiff humours with which these records bristle. Among Byron's early friends was R. C. Dallas, a family connection and a man by more than thirty years the poet's senior. Some of the letters written by Byron to his mother were given by the poet to Dallas, who also kept the letters he himself received from Byron during the active term of their acquaintance, 1808 to 1814. These letters Dallas arranged during the poet's lifetime, together with his own commentary, intending publication to be deferred until Byron's death, which he naturally supposed would be a considerable time after his own. Byron dying in 1824, however, Dallas proposed at once to bring his volume out, and announced this through the usual channels. Whereupon Hobhouse, who at the time was unaware of his nomination by Byron as an executor, wrote to Dallas in peremptory though insufficiently authorised terms.

6 Albany, London, *June* 23.

Dear Sir,

I see by the newspapers, and I have heard from other quarters, that it is your intention to publish a volume of memoirs, interspersed with letters and other documents relative to Lord Byron. I cannot believe this to be the case, as from what I had the pleasure of knowing of you, I thought that you would never think of taking such a step without consulting, or at least giving warning to the family and more immediate friends of Lord Byron. As to the publication of Lord Byron's private letters, I am certain that, for the present, at least, and without a previous inspection by his family, no man of honour and feeling can for a moment entertain such an idea—and I take the liberty of letting you know, that Mrs. Leigh, his Lordship's sister, would consider such a measure as quite unpardonable.

An intimacy of twenty years with his Lordship may perhaps justify me in saying that I am sure he would deprecate, had he any means of interfering, the exposure of his private writings, unless after very mature consultation with those who have the greatest interest in his fame and character, I mean his family and relations.

I trust you will be so kind as to excuse me for my anxiety on this point, and for requesting you would have the goodness to make an early reply to this communication.

Yours, very faithfully,
John C. Hobhouse.

Dallas, of whom the worst that can be said is that he was, in Moore's words, "well meaning, but one of those officious, self-satisfied advisers whom it was the delight of Lord Byron at all times to astonish and mystify," [1] not unnaturally took no direct notice of a letter that, in the absence of any formal authority, smacked of impertinence. Hobhouse, however, shortly after this heard that he was one of Byron's executors, and thereupon called upon the publisher who had announced the proposed book. He was told that the claim made by Dallas to right of publication appeared to be satisfactory, but that a friend, whose name could

[1] Lord Ernle endorses this estimate of Dallas, with the addition of the terms "dull and industrious." Moore elsewhere pays tribute to the "discretion and taste" with which Dallas intervened in the matter of publishing *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.

not be divulged, "a gentleman of high respectability," as we are told by Dallas's son in his record of the transaction, had superintended the work through the press, and that any application in the matter must be made to him.

This friend was in fact Dallas's son himself. On hearing of what had taken place, he wrote a letter to Hobhouse, which, although it may be a little clerical in tone, makes, it must be allowed, two or three very neat points.

Wooburn Vicarage, near Beaconsfield, Bucks,
July, 3*rd* 1824.

Sir,

Mr. Knight has informed me of the conversation he has had with you upon the subject of Lord Byron's correspondence.

I might have expected that as you are not unacquainted with my father, his character would have been a sufficient guarantee of the proper nature of any work which should appear before the public under his direction. . . . In the present case, both his general character as a Christian and a gentleman, and his particular connection with the family of Lord Byron, should have prevented the alarm which appears to have been excited in your mind. . . . The work will speedily speak for itself, and will show that my father's object has been to place the original character of Lord Byron's mind in its true light, to show the much of good that was in it; and the work leaves him when the good became obscured in the much of evil that I fear afterwards predominated. . . .

As to any fear for the character of others who may be mentioned in the work, my father, sir, is incapable of publishing personalities; and Lord Byron, at the time he corresponded with my father, was, I believe, incapable of writing what ought not to be published. If, at any subsequent period, in corresponding with others, he should have degraded himself to do so, I trust that his correspondents will be wise enough to abstain from making public what ought never to have been written.

The letters which Lord Byron wrote to his mother were given by him unreservedly to my father, in a manner which seemed to have reference to their future publication; but which certainly rendered them my father's property, to dispose of in what way he might think fit . . . any measures to obtain further proof of this . . . can only be considered as a matter of dispute of

property, as Lord Byron's best friends cannot but wish them published. . . .

I remain,
Your obedient Servant,
ALEX. R. C. DALLAS.

In the meantime Dallas senior, although he had not favoured Hobhouse himself with any attention, had so far taken notice of the offending letter as to write to Mrs. Leigh, and this posy may fitly be completed by giving a summary of his communication and of her reply.

STE. ADDRESSE, *June 30th*, 1824.

MADAM,

I have just received a letter, of which I enclose you a copy. I see by the direction, through what channel it has been forwarded to me. As the letter is signed by the son of a gentleman, I would answer it, could I do it in such a manner as to be of service to the mind of the writer, but having no hope of that, I shall content myself with practising the humility of putting up with it for the present. . . . I must profess that I do not believe that you authorised such a letter. . . . If, in the book I am about to publish, there is a sentence which should give you uneasiness, I should be totally at a loss to find it out myself. I will go further, my dear madam, and inform you, that Lord Byron was perfectly well acquainted with the existence of my MS., and with my intention of publishing it, or rather of having it published when it pleased God to call him from this life—but I little suspected that I should myself see the publication of it. . . . I wished as much as possible to avoid giving pain, even to those that deserved it, and I curtailed my MS. nearly a half. If I restore my portion of what I have crossed out, shall I not be justified by the insolence of the letter I have received from a pretended friend of Lord Byron, and who seems to be ignorant that a twenty years' companionship may exist without a spark of friendship? I do not wonder at his agitation; it is for himself that he is agitated, not for Lord Byron. . . . I will conclude by assuring you, that I feel that Lord B. will stand in *my* volume in the amiable point of view that he ought and would have stood always but for *his friends*.

It was my purpose to order a copy of the volume to be sent to you. As I trust you will do me the honour, by a few lines,

to let me know that it was not your intention to have me insulted, I will hope still to have that pleasure.

I am, dear madam,

Yours, faithfully,
R. C. Dallas.

It is worth noting here that the son, in commenting on this letter, observes that the references to passages calculated to give Mrs. Leigh pain are concerned only with statements about Byron likely to be unpleasant reading to a sister and that the original manuscript contains no reflection of any kind on her own character. Mrs. Leigh's answer was as follows:

St. James's Palace, *July* 3, 1824.

Sir,

I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 30th June, and am sorry to observe the spirit in which it is written.

In consequence of the message you sent me through Mrs. Heath (confirming the report of your intention to publish your manuscript), I applied to Mr. Hobhouse, requesting him to write to you, and expressing to him that I did, *as I still do*, think that it would be quite unpardonable to publish private letters of my poor brother's without previously consulting his family. . . .

I feel equal regret and surprise at your thinking it necessary to call upon me to disclaim an intention of "*having you insulted*," —*regret*, that you should so entirely misunderstand my feelings; and *surprise*, because after having repeatedly read over Mr. Hobhouse's letter, I cannot discover in it one word which would lead to such a conclusion on your part.

Hoping that this explanation may prove satisfactory,

I remain, Sir,

Your obedient servant,
Augusta Leigh.

Thereafter the quarrel grew apace. Hobhouse and Hanson, as Byron's executors, applied for an injunction against Dallas, which was granted. The affidavit sworn by them on this occasion is subjected to a telling scrutiny by Dallas junior, who observes with a good deal of excuse at one point that "it is hardly possible to conjecture how extensive Mr. Hobhouse's interpretation of an oath may become." Hobhouse might airily

dismiss "young Parson Dallas," who "accuses me of perjury, and yet I live and move as usual; and if I notice his nonsense it will only be in joke," [1] but he had, none the less, sworn in his affidavit that Byron had only placed his letters to his mother in the hands of Dallas for safe custody, whereas Dallas was able to show that they were given to him with discretionary powers, and he is entitled to his complaint against "the disgraceful insinuation of the application, that I am capable of publishing letters which ought not to be made public." The fact is, and it is another instance of the way Byron had of precipitating everybody into a midsummer night's dream, that Hobhouse, the most prudent and scrupulous of men, in his sworn testimony on this occasion was at least sailing very near the wind. The provisional injunction granted by the Vice-Chancellor was upheld by Lord Eldon, as on legal grounds was inevitable, and the book, a large part of which had been printed, was suppressed. Shortly afterwards, in the same year, Dallas died, and within a few months his *Recollections of the Life of Lord Byron* was brought out by his son, who prefaced the book with a full account of the proceedings that were responsible for the absence of the promised letters. He shows here and there a not surprising feeling of acrimony, complaining rather bitterly about the financial loss to his father—or himself—for the advantage of a few hundreds to an estate that Byron had stripped of a hundred thousand pounds. For it must be admitted that he provides ample evidence to show that the publication of the contested letters would have exalted rather than have diminished Byron in public estimation; that they contained nothing defamatory of other parties, though Hobhouse may have been a little cautious on his own account when he said at the time that, "if individuals were not spoken of with bitterness . . . in these letters, they were not like Lord Byron's letters in general"; that his father had a clear moral, though no legal, right to the letters, and that Byron gave them to him to publish as and when his own taste and judgment directed; and that the executors, in opposing publication, were, in view of the circumstances, inviting the charge that they

[1] Fox, p. 181.

PLATE II

LORD BYRON

at the age of 19

were considering only the commercial value of the property in dispute.

No indulgence need be asked for the attention given to a transaction which besides illustrating the present purpose is so entertaining in itself. Dallas died almost on the moment of completing his book, which appeared with a supplementary chapter by his son; in this is noted the publication, on the day of old Dallas's funeral, of Thomas Medwin's *Conversations of Lord Byron*. Medwin, who was Shelley's cousin, enjoys the distinction of having been steadily and heartily abused by both sides. Dallas the younger is piously thankful that his father was spared the pain of reading a book that "fills the mind with an unvaried train of miserable reflections." John Galt, who published his *Life of Lord Byron* in 1830, ostensibly as a corrective or complement to Moore's official biography, disparages Medwin's reliability and intelligence, but adds ingenuously, "Still there are occasional touches of merit in the feeble outlines of Captain Medwin, and with this conviction it would be negligence not to avail myself of them," and declines to withdraw his censure even after seeing a pamphlet in which Medwin answers an article by Hobhouse in *The Westminster Review* abusing himself and Dallas. Lord Ernle accepts Medwin as a "valuable record of Byron's random talk," but impugns his taste. Fletcher, Byron's valet, says plainly that Medwin is a liar, Scrope Davies [1] reports that he is an idiot, Moore tells us of the "careless, half mystifying confidences of these nocturnal sittings, implicitly listened to and confusedly recollected [to which] we owe the volume with which Captain Medwin, soon after the death of the noble poet, favoured the world." Mrs. Stowe, it is true, inclines to tolerate Medwin to the extent of explaining away the suggestion that he was "bammed" by Byron, since it would not at all suit her book to have his reports discredited, and Lord Lovelace allows him a like word of absolution for the same reason.

[1] To whom Byron dedicated *Parisina; The Siege of Corinth,* published in the same volume, was inscribed to Hobhouse, who did not much appreciate this division of spoils. "I should have liked it better if he had not dedicated *Parisina* to S. B. Davies. I told him this" (*Recollections of a Long Life*).

But Mr. John Murray exclaims of him with contempt, "of all people, the discredited Medwin," and finally Mr. Thomas J. Wise comes to the considered opinion that he was in set terms a blackmailer.

The contributions made to the story of Byron by these writers and others who can be shown to have been as deeply plagued in their minds, Leigh Hunt, for example, will be considered on their merits in the progress of this book. Enough has been said for the moment to show the heated and often unwholesome atmosphere in which that story has commonly unfolded itself.

2

And what of the man himself who was the cause of so much vexation and reproach? This it is the purpose of this study to determine as far as I can, but certain negative conclusions may be stated already. What Byron was needs patient investigation to discover, but it will be helpful at first to define some of the things that he was not. The evidence about him is voluminous, and much of it admirably lucid. The foregoing sketch of the controversial tumult that has raged about him must not be taken as implying that confusion is the common state of Byronic literature. Our task at least is not complicated by obscurity in the sources. Most of the people who have written about Byron have written angrily, often with violent prejudice and often with flagrant inaccuracy; but, with a few exceptions, they have written extremely well. Byron has inspired his critics, friendly and offensive, with nearly every possible fault of discretion and manners and even of judgment, and he has nearly always inspired them to a spirited and positive style. Dallas, Medwin, Moore, Galt, Trelawny, Hobhouse, Parry, Hunt, Gamba, when the best and worst has been said of these and others as witnesses, the fact remains that they all write well about a good subject. To make a living figure out of their many musings is, indeed, in one sense the more difficult because of the emphasis with which they are able to present their infinitely varied views; but it is to be noted that the difficulty is one that arises from sharpness,

PORTRAIT OF LORD BYRON IN THE COLLECTION OF MRS. BEECHER STOWE.

"LOOK ON THIS PI

PORTRAIT OF LORD BYRON IN THE HEARTS OF THE BRITISH NATION.

'JRE AND ON THAT."

and not from uncertainty, of definition. There is little or no agreement among them in their testimony, but there is no mistaking what each of them does in fact say.

In one respect, however, the strident vehemence that sometimes beguiled them all alike has resulted in creating a false figure of Byron for very wide acceptance. And Byron himself, partly by natural instinct and partly for mere devilment, has assisted very largely in the establishment of this illusion. The dark nature of the charges brought against him, the circumstances of his "exile," the stormy passion that has beset pleaders for and against his cause, and his own incorrigible habit of playing up to every scandal and legend about himself, have conspired to set before the world a character that could exist nowhere off the stage of melodrama. The Byron of popular fallacy moves in a convention of red fire and trap-doors to musical reminiscences of pale hands I loved. This has always been the idea about Byron that has persuaded the uninformed; and it must be admitted that it is an idea that has always been a little in the minds of the informed as well. At the front of the second volume of Moore's *Life* is a magnificent plate, engraved by Finden after Sanders, depicting Byron as his authorised biographical sponsors would have him envisaged by the world. A thunderous sky is hanging low above a wild coast, from which rocky peaks rise into the clouds, white gulls flying across the livid promise of a storm. A sailing ship is lying off-shore, flying the British ensign, and a boat manned by one faithful attendant who is standing in his best pantaloons up to his shins in water and waiting hopefully for his master the poet, is ready to put off. In the foreground Byron is posed in a trance of beauty, bareheaded, in perfect court shoes, the classic scarf flying on the wind from an exquisite throat, the white hands advantageously displayed, the whole figure imposingly abstracted in its perfect knowledge of an audience. The picture, which is here reproduced, is a splendid one; but it goes beyond its own intention, being the key to a whole world of misrepresentation. For this is nothing of Byron the poet, or Byron the man; it is merely, and most attractively, Byron the actor. This actor-Byron was a very real entity, let

there be no mistake about that, but it was of infinitely less importance than the poet and than the man. And yet by some cross of fortune it was this aspect of Byron that was grossly encouraged by circumstance, by instructed opinion, by popular fancy, and by his own perversity, to assert itself so flagrantly that at length it became almost the only image that was recognised. The favourable and the detrimental views of Byron were equally infested by this fantastic sentimentality, as was illustrated very adroitly, at the time of Mrs. Stowe's ill-judged demonstration, by a satirical paper called *The Tomahawk* in a cartoon that has seemed worth preserving.

That Byron had in him a streak of sensationalism vivid enough to flatter the most wildly romantic of his historians is true, but it is a quality that got altogether out of perspective. His spasmodic excesses of morals and behaviour invited all the attention they got, but it was too often forgotten that after all they were spasmodic, that the real Byron was a human being and not a transpontine figure of fun. His humours and his offences were all seen enmeshed in some kind of frantic association, and frantic became his only wear. There grew up a legend of a handsome but sinister young nobleman who wrote ravishing verses and lived in perpetual convulsions of conduct. The real Childe Harold was pictured as on an unresting demoniac pilgrimage, assaulting all the sanctities of Church and State at every halting-place, gibing by habit at the decencies of common intercourse, achieving daily seductions, and never sober for twenty-four hours together. Some secretly admired the spectacle, some openly execrated it, but belief in it was a matter of common currency. Byron himself heartily abetted it; here is a passage from Medwin, in which we may or may not see the poet "bamming" his credulous friend, but which in either case was taken by an eager public as recording no more than a commonplace of this sensational life:

> I was very fond at that time of a Turkish girl,—ay, fond of her as I have been of few women. All went on very well till the Ramazan. For forty days, which is rather a long fast for lovers, all intercourse between the sexes is forbidden by law,

as well as by religion. During this Lent of the Mussulmans, the women are not allowed to quit their apartments . . . all my thoughts were occupied in planning an assignation, when, as ill fate would have it, the means I took to effect it led to the discovery of our secret. The penalty was death,—death without reprieve,—a horrible death, at which one cannot think without shuddering! An order was issued for the law being put into immediate effect. In the meantime I knew nothing of what had happened. . . . I was taking one of my usual evening rides by the sea-side, when I observed a crowd of people moving down to the shore. . . . I thought I could now and then distinguish a faint and stifled shriek. . . . What was my horror to learn that they were carrying an unfortunate girl, sewn up in a sack, to be thrown into the sea! I did not hesitate as to what was to be done. I knew I could depend on my faithful Albanians, and rode up to the officer commanding the party, threatening, in case of his refusal to give up his prisoner, that I would adopt means to compel him. He did not like the business he was on, or perhaps the determined look of my body-guard, and consented to accompany me back to the city with the girl, whom I soon discovered to be my Turkish favourite. Suffice it to say, that my interference with the chief magistrate, backed by a heavy bribe, saved her; but it was only on condition that I should break off all intercourse with her, and that she should immediately quit Athens, and be sent to her friends in Thebes. There she died, a few days after her arrival, of a fever—perhaps of love.

Dallas, whose narrative stops at 1816, cannot bring himself to dwell upon the pollution of later years. "With petty wits he had now begun to amalgamate his pure and lofty genius . . . he proceeded in that wonderful and extraordinary medley, in which we at once feel the poet and see the man: no eulogy will reach his towering height in the former character; no eulogy dictated by friendship . . . will, I fear, cover the—I have no word, I will use none—that has been fastened upon him in the latter."

Galt, who is concerned much more with the intellectual than the personal character of Byron, nevertheless permits himself to say:

The riper years of one so truly the nursling of pride, poverty, and pain, could only be inconsistent, wild and impassioned, even had his temperament been moderate and well disciplined.

But when it is considered that in addition to all the awful influences of these fatalities, for they can receive no lighter name, he possessed an imagination of unbounded capacity—was inflamed with those indescribable feelings which constitute, in the opinion of many, the very elements of genius—fearfully quick in the discernment of the darker qualities of character—and surrounded by temptation—his career ceases to surprise. It would have been more wonderful had he proved an amiable and well-conducted man, than the questionable and extraordinary being who has alike provoked the malice and interested the admiration of the world.

Such temperance is far below the level of Mrs. Stowe and her kind. In Lord Lovelace's pages Byron appears in full Mephistophelian panoply.

Byron saw in his imagination an incommensurate void gaping beneath overhanging ledges upon which he was perched, with no possible descent. Bulging precipices drop beneath him to uplands glowing in the tints of June. A sunny mirage from the chasm between his feet becomes the vision of the optimist dreamer, but Byron well knows that no living foot can ever plant itself upon that paradise, the flight to which seems so easy, and he takes refuge from the terror of the abyss in formidable flashes of laughter, in fleeting agitations, diversions, and illusions.

Frantic, indeed. And again:

A display of moral baseness, of human infamy caught in the act, stirred him to fierce transports of delight. Such cruel rejoicing over the ignominy of man is said to be the resurrection of an ape or tiger ancestor. . . . "Unconsumed and unconsuming" passions drove him from childhood, and devastated the lives of himself and those near him—made him a destroyer of all he could reach in private or public. . . . The constitution of his body and mind had destined him to his swift and feverish pilgrimage from family, country, friends, mankind, and life.[1]

And the anonymous writer, in his answer to *Astarte* already mentioned, in terms that might well cause Byron to exclaim "Defend me from my defenders," says, "But, bearing in mind

[1] *Astarte* (1905), pp. 96, 97, 100, 114.

what we have said of Byron's devilishness, of the tendency in mad boasting to grow into delusion, and even the possibility, at which we have only hinted, of some half-mocking attempt upon his sister; and further, remembering the love of a wicked man to torture a victim, this letter, if it be from him to her, coming from his filthy stye in Venice, need not even stagger us . . . we believe that Mrs. Leigh appraised it rightly, as the letter of a malignant half-maniac, half-impostor."

As we say, to be unimpressed by these fulminations is not to pretend that they contain nothing of the truth. The most grotesque of legends will be found at some point to rest on reality, and there was in Byron something by which almost any hysteria of accusation could be supported, just as there was much in him to countenance the equally false idealisation from which he has suffered. The trouble is that the exaggerations of a character which was admittedly more heavily charged with caprice than is common, have been consistently confused with the character itself. Mr. Harold Nicolson had to clear away this confusion with some severity before he could present his beautifully composed and sympathetic study of Byron in his last phase.[1] He inclines perhaps a little to neglect the Byron of false detraction in his determination to expose the Byron of sentimental eulogy; but, however that may be, he does leave himself with a living personality upon which to work. It is an extension of this personality into the full term of Byron's life that is the purpose of this present book. Such an attempt upon the volume of evidence to be considered would have been infinitely more difficult had it not been for the great edition of Byron's poems and letters prepared by Mr. Ernest Hartley Coleridge and Lord Ernle. The erudite critical notes supplied by these editors are very amply arranged, and, while they are very human in character, they are untainted by any touch of sensationalism.

During our investigation one essential fact has to be borne steadily in mind: Byron was a poet of immensely prolific output.

1 *Byron. The Last Journey. April* 1823–*April* 1824. (1924.)

Chapter I

CONTROVERSY

"A host of enemies are now come forth, who, though they dared not brave the burning heat of his present rays, think they may safely sport with the shadowed and unresisting splendours of the past."

—Egerton Brydges.

1

I HAVE called this book *Byron: A Conflict*, wishing to make it clear it was not to be *Byron: A Controversy*. Nevertheless, there is one matter of an acutely controversial kind about which something has to be decided before it is possible to write about Byron at all. Apart from that, though Byron may remain a creature compact of contradictions, all that is needed to perceive his many oddly sorted aspects is patience. But our own view of his character as a whole, whatever our reading of the action in which he is the central figure, must inevitably be in some degree governed by our decision upon one question. When he was twenty-seven he married Anne Isabella Milbanke, four years his junior. A year later the contracting parties signed a deed of separation, to the astonishment of the world. The reason for Lady Byron's action—it was she who insisted on the separation—was not divulged at the time, and Byron continued throughout his life to profess ignorance of it. Gradually a rumour spread in society that it was to be found in the fact that Byron had committed incest with his half-sister, Augusta. It is this charge that Mrs. Stowe and Lord Lovelace wrote their books to prove.

The one impossible attitude to take up about the question is that it does not matter. It is idle for Lord Lovelace to protest that after Byron's departure from England in a cloud of scandal no interest in him survived, that in this country, at least, "no more Byron was wanted, not even a supposititious one," that

Byron's works have fallen into disrepute, that (in 1905) "for many years the public have been in a condition of stolid indifference to both" (Byron and his wife), that his memory is extinguished save "as an episode in the decline and fall of oligarchical England into popular government." The facts plainly discredit such a view, and Byron continues to be, for a variety of reasons, as vivid a figure as any in our literature, one might almost say as any in our national history. Nor is the further argument, that the incidents of a poet's private life are of no concern to any one but his own family, more convincing. A hundred years have passed since Byron's death; if his story is inherently interesting, I know of no rational claim that can be advanced to its possession by a descendant three generations removed that may not be shared by any one who cares for poetry and the manifestations of character. If it be urged, in reply, that there may be secrets that even at so long an interval must be preserved for the honour or peace of the family, it can only be remarked that Lord Lovelace, in publishing *Astarte*, chose a very odd way of vindicating that opinion.

To profess an interest in a poet's work and an indifference to his character and its expression in his life is to affect a virtue that in truth has very little merit in it. There is a wholesome interest in these things, just as there is too often a scandalous and impudent curiosity, and we have to distinguish between them. There are always people who delight in listening to and spreading rumour injurious to eminent reputations, and the taste is even organised in a dirty and disgraceful trade. But this ready turn for defamation on wholly insufficient or unexamined evidence has nothing to do with the patient investigation of truth, so far as it can be determined by the light of ample information generously considered. The scavengers of gossip have neither inclination to discover this truth nor ability to interpret it when found. They know some obscure satisfaction in giving currency to reports that may be false, but must be malicious. But, carefully presented about men who have distinguished themselves by uncommon gifts, it has always been a perfectly legitimate object of interest to well-ordered minds. If we are sure of the facts,

we do no injustice even if in certain matters we form unfavourable judgments upon people whom generally we admire; if we are uncertain as to facts, we may with equal justice tend towards indulgence upon questionable points in view of our knowledge of our subject's character as a whole; the one unpardonable offence is to condemn on insufficient evidence.

Passing from the general principle to Byron as a particular case, our view is confirmed in an unusual degree. It has been observed by more than one critic that no poet has been more dependent upon the external aspect of his experience for the substance of his poetry than he. To deny Byron invention in his poetry would be to make too dangerous an admission in any claim for him as if not one of the greatest at least as one of the very considerable poets. But superficially his art is as unlike that of Shelley, who abstracted his world into a convention so unworldly as to be enigmatic to many intelligent readers, or that of Shakespeare, who charged every individual gesture with a profoundly universal significance, as well could be. It may or may not be allowed that Byron was a great poet, but no competent judge can deny that he was a very great writer. And, if there is such a thing as an inspired journalist, Byron is the living witness of the fact. His poetry, great or not, is durably entertaining, but it must be admitted that his letters, to the composition of which he devoted a considerable part of his energy, are no less so, not only in their witty accomplishment, but also in their essential vision. And poetry and letters alike are related always with obvious intimacy to the physical and casual events of his life. Abstraction to him is, with the slightest reservation, an unknown device. His letters are clearly a frank—some people would say a shameless—transcript of his personal adventure, and his poetry, with the merest formality of manipulation, and sometimes with less than that, is this also. It is, therefore, deceptive to pretend that we who find ourselves absorbed by his writing, whatever its faults may be, every time we return to it, have no concern to discover the truth about that adventure as exactly as we can.

To approach the Byron story with a moral intention is to be lost. Moral considerations must, it is true, arise in our ex-

amination, rather poignantly at times, but they must evolve themselves as part of our material and not be imposed upon it. For eighty years, from Byron's death, that is, until the publication of *Astarte*, one of the principal poetic energies of the modern world was made the tilting ground of innumerable moralists, good moralists and bad moralists, obsequious moralists and mad moralists. And they all were lost in the same maze. Whether Byron was or was not a scoundrel may be a matter of some public interest; indeed the experience of a century has shown pretty plainly that anything to do with Byron is of public interest. Reviled or acclaimed, little poet or great poet, he has been from the first day of his fame one of the inescapable figures of English literature. Like him or not, we have to take notice of him. But whether Lady Byron was a greatly wronged or a greatly offending woman is a question in itself of small public concern. These accounts are settled somewhere, we may suppose; but the character of a woman, who had no distinction other than the considerably unhappy one of being Byron's wife for a year, can never in itself have been an adequate occasion for the quarrels of public prints, a fact of which, to do her undoubted shrewdness justice, she was herself fully aware. And yet it is upon this character that the moralists have chiefly spent their fury.

It is true that the controversial climax of Byron's life involves her character in its issues. But this is chiefly in its relation to the third protagonist in the story, Augusta Leigh. Lord Lovelace asserts that "the character and life of Lady Byron are not public property. She was condemned by a Pharisee race with usurped jurisdiction. [Note: it is scarcely the Pharisees who have been her traducers.] The false witness against her was not consciously or intentionally the work of her husband. Criminal use was made of his dreadful, but not wholly unnatural and insincere, words. The shame and the guilt belong to strangers who intervened without right and accused without cause."

Paying as little attention as it deserves to the shrug at strangers, and acknowledging Lord Lovelace's perfectly reasonable loyalty to his grandmother, we must maintain that her reputation

is in question only on account of a controversy to which he has been a chief contributor. Suppose him to have proved his charge, which for the moment we neither admit nor deny, then Byron's friends have every right to inquire stringently into her part in this dismal aspect of his career. And this is so because that part affects very deeply a relationship, that between Byron and his sister, which, whatever its moral solution may prove to be, was one of the most important in his life. If the quarrel were between Byron and his wife alone history would fairly enough exonerate or censure him and leave her to whatever reckoning may be beyond human judgment; since it is not cynicism to observe that history is concerned with Byron, while it has too many affairs on hand to pay attention to Lady Byron apart from her relation to him. But as her action projects itself vitally into this other very pregnant influence upon his nature, history has to take strict note of it.

Establishing thus our right to an interest in Byron's affairs, we cannot escape the reflection that it does materially matter whether we decide that he did or did not commit incest with Augusta, or that the question still awaits its final answer. If we conclude that, so far as the evidence can guide us, he did, it does not mean that our interest in him is diminished. The uncompromising moralist may dissent from us in this. We can well understand that some quite liberal minds may find themselves unable to be liberal on this particular question. If Byron had been charged with murder, shall we say, it is conceivable that there might be circumstances which would induce public opinion at this distant date to allow a verdict of justifiable homicide. But it may be impossible for many otherwise latitudinarian spirits to allow a verdict of justifiable incest. To write about Byron is, however, to write of a man likely always to be unintelligible in some degree to many people. Repeating that to approach him with a moral intention is to be lost, it may be added that a complexity of character which includes even perversity is not the less interesting to analysis because of its darker moods, nor even less instructive.

2

It is the purpose of this book to tell the story of Byron's life, seen in relation to his work, as directly as possible. It seemed, with this end in view, desirable to determine first of all what were the salient qualities of the man. What he did is for the most part told very fully in his correspondence and the records of more or less intimate friends, and this account is enlarged to an uncommon extent in his creative writings. He was in many respects an incalculable being, full of ungovernable or ungoverned impulses, touched with an incurably theatrical waywardness, and in an almost violent degree the representative product of a Europe emerging at once exhausted and defiant from an epoch of military and political convulsion. All these things combine to make him a very surprising figure to any possessed and tranquil intelligence. Allowing his character to be complicated by no abnormal strain, we find him in the natural course of his expression a personality very likely to administer shocks to the ordinary run of human mentality. But accepting him thus on the terms of his own nature, the centre of gravity in our reading of him is still further affected by our view of this extraneous charge against him. He was a rake, a rebel, an iconoclast, something of a mountebank, a cynic of deadly aim, an unashamed egotist, mercurial in his tastes, sudden and uncompromising in his angers, capable of strange inclemencies. All this we know, but, seen even in their disposition to his many and lovely virtues, his tenderness and his generosity, his often admirable pride of rank and his still more admirable pride of art, and at last his utterly heroic devotion to a cause, a devotion that would have honoured Bayard himself, these flagrancies of character are still within the compass of normal human complexity. His alleged relations with Augusta are beyond it.

Since the time when Byron signed the deed of separation in 1816 the pendulum of opinion has swung to and fro many times. At the moment of the breach the general verdict was that Lady Byron had acted with unaccountable severity towards a wild but not irreclaimable husband. But a minority verdict made itself

assertive enough to leave Byron so much a figure of censure as to send him into what he with his histrionic instinct chose to call his exile. While he was alive the situation remained much of the same sort. Majority opinion was with him, but opposition was sufficiently acute to make it inconvenient for him to return to England; and he never did return. In 1869 Mrs. Stowe threw the opposition into sudden and violent prominence, and thereupon a babel of argument fell upon a forgotten quarrel, though by no means, as Lord Lovelace would have us believe, upon a forgotten name. The renewed debate slowly subsided until Lord Lovelace, feeling himself compelled by a family sentiment, came forward at the beginning of the century with his elaborate, and, it must be admitted, extremely well arranged and in parts well written treatise, to show that his grandmother was a paragon at the cost of showing that his grandfather was not only incestuous but a pretty considerable cad into the bargain.

Before proceeding, then, to our plain narrative, we must review the available evidence on this one question.

In considering the evidence of witnesses, it will be appropriate to take some notice of the character of each. Sometimes this will be done immediately, sometimes in the later body of the narrative. When the substance of a piece of evidence is given verbatim, I ask the indulgence of the reader that he may believe that it is on accepted authority; this I do in order to avoid an embarrassment of foot-notes. When the purport only of testimony is given, such references as seemed necessary have been supplied.

Byron himself, as has been remarked, steadily asserted, from the time of the separation until his death, that he was wholly unaware of the reason that induced his wife to leave him. It must at once be noted, for what it is worth, that she did, in essential fact, leave him, and that he did not dismiss her. He asked, on more than one occasion, both directly and indirectly, for an explanation of her action. Whether he knew the truth or not, he consistently behaved until his death as though he were entirely uninformed.

He carried this position to the point of asserting, on two wholly distinct occasions, that he was ready to go into court to justify

himself: first at the time of the separation itself (see later, in the Hobhouse evidence), and again when he was dissatisfied as to the control of his daughter, Ada.[1]

There is no doubt that he was willing, at dates separated by six years, to face any charges that he knew Lady Byron might bring against him in court rather than allow what he considered to be unwise or unfair conduct about the child. The tone of his communication in each case is such as to convince us that he meant what he said and was prepared to stand by it. Byron must have known very well that if it came to an open contest his wife would use every resource rather than lose in practice the custody of the daughter, which technically under the settlement remained with Byron as father. Indeed, on the very occasion of Byron's letter to Augusta noted below, Lady Byron had written to her legal adviser, Stephen Lushington, asking whether she should consult Byron before taking Ada abroad, her reasons for thinking it advisable to do so being that if Byron told her to do as she liked it would be tantamount to a resignation of his paternal authority, while if he forbade the journey it would give her "cause and justification for seeking the means of security in this respect"—and so get the matter settled once and for all. That any resistance on his part would be met in this temper Byron had no reason to doubt, and yet he was clearly ready to challenge that temper if necessity should arise. If he knew that Lady Byron was prepared and able to plead against him the fact of incestuous relations with his sister, and was in a position to

[1] In a letter dated October 1st, 1816, Byron asks Augusta to inform Lady Bryon that he will not allow Ada to be taken out of England, and to get from her an assurance that his wishes shall be respected. On January 13th following, he returns to the subject, and says that if the answer is still refused he "will take *legal measures* to enforce it. *Remember* I do not seek this, I wish it not, I regret it, but I require an explicit promise that Ada shall on no consideration quit the country, whether the mother does or no, and by all that is most sacred there is no measure which I will not take to prevent it, failing in a reply to my just demand. So say—and so I will do." And in 1822, writing to Hobhouse, he refers to information that his portrait had been covered up by Lady Byron until Ada should come of age, and says that he will not wittingly have his daughter's mind biased against him, and that failing an undertaking to this effect they must have "something about her settled in Chancery." He further stipulates that Mrs. Clermont shall have nothing to do with her, and concludes, "If these points are not accorded, I must come to England, and bring the matter before a court of law, as far as regards her education and my parental right to direct it."

establish her case, it is hardly likely that he would have been willing to face so formidable an ordeal even for a cause so dear to him as his paternal right in Ada undoubtedly was.

We must consider here a very ingenious point that Sir John Fox makes in his examination of the evidence, an examination wholly sympathetic to Lady Byron. At the time of the separation, when Hobhouse was negotiating on Byron's behalf with Lady Byron's representatives, he tried to get some explicit statement from them as to her reasons for what she was doing. In this he failed, and thereupon asked whether, as a condition of Byron's agreement not to carry the matter into court, she would give an undertaking that if the case had gone on she would not have laid against him either of two specified charges about which scandal was busy in the town. One of these charges was incest, and the required undertaking was given under Lady Byron's hand.[1]

This document (which on account of subsequent circumstances Hobhouse supposed to have been destroyed, but which was in fact preserved [2]) has been of peculiar significance to both parties in the dispute, though in fact more vitally so to Lady Byron than to her husband. At the time it may have given Byron some sense of security, though to what extent it is difficult to tell; while it certainly went far to dispel the most critical anxieties of his supporters, who would be inclined to take Lady Byron's disavowal at its face value against any suspicions that may have been forced into their minds in spite of themselves. It is clear, for example, that Hobhouse at the time, as will be seen, was perfectly satisfied that there was no truth in the rumours, and of all Byron's friends he was in closest contact with the events from day to day. In later years, however, the case against Byron has been founded upon evidence that this document does not touch, and, although it still stands in his favour, it is not in itself sufficient to clear him. But the disavowal, it is claimed by her friends, touches Lady Byron herself much more closely. The opinion against her has always been divided in character. Some of her critics have maintained that at first she acted irresponsibly,

[1] Hobhouse, 1870, p. 125. [2] Fox, p. 112.

and subsequently deceived herself into accepting a theory of guilt that she could not support by convincing evidence.[1] This position will not bear examination, and has long since been abandoned by impartial judges. Others have held that Lady Byron's action in forcing the separation was in fact directed by her knowledge of relations between Byron and Augusta; but that, this being so, she stands convicted of almost incredible duplicity in her letters written to Augusta at the time of the crisis, and for a considerable period afterwards. And this charge has been a very damaging one to Lady Byron's character, whatever may have been the truth about Byron himself. It was, therefore, with no small feeling of relief that her apologists came upon what they conceived to be a way out of their difficulty.

The first publication on the matter to claim authority was Mrs. Stowe's so-called history, in 1869-1870. The author explained that for nine years from Lady Byron's death she had waited in vain for the family or some other authorised persons to come forward in vindication of her friend's name, which had ever since the unhappy days of 1816 been subject to shameless and ignorant misrepresentation. Now, since no one else would speak, she must. Of the relationship between the two friends, which began in 1853, Charles Mackay has an effective passage in *Medora Leigh:*

> An intimacy sprang up between the two ladies on the anti-slavery and negro question—the chief, though by no means the only, sympathetic bond between them. They were both literary; both what used to be called "blues"; both professional philanthropists; both strong-minded women; both celebrated, though in very different ways; and of tastes, and of modes of looking at men and things, and at the world in general, that seem to have been remarkably congenial. The intimacy thus formed soon expanded into an ardent friendship, such as commonly occurs only among gushing young ladies at school, or among older ladies who think that they have suffered long at the hands of the other sex, or who look down upon that sex from the lofty pedestal of moral virtue to which they imagine that they have clambered.

[1] See note, p. 51.

On her second visit to England Mrs. Stowe had, she tells us, been entrusted by Lady Byron with a secret which she now, in the absence of any other voice, felt called upon to divulge. From evidence that is about to be given, it is highly probable that the extent of Lady Byron's communication to her was that she had knowledge of improper relations having taken place between Augusta and Byron before the date of her marriage.[1] If this was so, Mrs. Stowe in her history gravely went beyond her commission, if she can be said to have had any commission at all, a claim that the lawyers in charge of Lady Byron's papers flatly denied in public directly after the appearance of Mrs. Stowe's statement. This statement was to the effect that Lady Byron knew of the incestuous intrigue, that it extended over a time covering periods before and after her marriage to Byron, and that it was the direct cause of her leaving him, or being driven from him. Mrs. Stowe's account is so demonstrably inaccurate in certain minor details, that it is not unfair to assume that after the lapse of years her imagination had taken a good deal of licence on essential points also.

The revelation was at once met by a defence in *The Quarterly*, the most telling part of which was the publication of a number of Lady Byron's letters written to Augusta. This left Lady Byron's character exposed, whatever the facts as to Byron's transgression might be, in an extremely unfavourable light, and Mrs. Stowe went out of court as one of the most disastrously successful advocates who had ever taken upon themselves the office of defence. For many years the controversy was left at this point. Strong prejudices were formed on both sides, as is always the case, without any knowledge of the circumstances, but more carefully informed opinion inclined to the belief that there was a good deal in the charge against Byron, and that in any case Lady Byron came out of the affair very badly. Then

[1] "Your lordship," says Sebastian Evans, the Birmingham poet, in an unpublished letter to Lord Lindsay, dated September 28th, 1869, "I observe, leans rather to the theory of some misunderstanding on the part of Mrs. Stowe. This also is exceedingly probable, but what *is* the value of a story told by one cranky old woman of hazy perceptions fourteen years after it had been told her by another subject to hallucinations?" As a boy, Evans had seen a good deal of Lady Byron in Leicestershire.

Lord Lovelace, seeing the dilemma in which his faction was placed, abruptly threw Mrs. Stowe over, impugning her motives and her authority. He submitted that the evidence pointed to there having been no repetition of the offence after marriage, and explained Lady Byron's conduct towards Augusta on the grounds that she believed in her sister-in-law's repentance and reformation, was naturally fond of her, and was sincerely anxious to reclaim her character. Sir John Fox wishes to take Lord Lovelace even further than this. He sees the difficulty still existing as to the cause of separation, since if the charge against Augusta is retained as the substance of this, Lady Byron's position shifts at best from one of perfidy to one of hardly more admirable compliance. To leave Byron because of his relations with Augusta, and to write at the same time to Augusta in terms of affectionate gratitude, as she admittedly did, concealing the nature of the charge for use in case of necessity (e.g., forcing Byron's hand about conditions of the separation) is only less creditable to Lady Byron's integrity than the alternative suggestion is to her wits, that in effect she said to Augusta: "I know the truth; I know also that you are repentant, and that you have resisted Byron's attempts to repeat the offence; I must leave him, but I welcome your continued friendship, and will consider your interests in every way possible." This, it must be observed, is said to a woman who is supposed to have been on the alleged terms with Byron to within a few months of his engagement, who was four years older than her brother, and was at the time a married woman living with her husband, and the mother of three children by him. To this woman Lady Byron, it is suggested, addressed herself in this manner, just as it is to be found in her own words that she said to her, in a letter dated July 17th, 1816: "I say now that I am thoroughly convinced that, if from the hour we met *all* your conduct had been open to me, *I* could not have found in it anything to reproach you with—for that your errors of judgment, however to be regretted, were perfectly *innocent*—God knows what satisfaction I have in making this acknowledgment—and in resigning doubts as to *those* parts of your conduct which have but transiently existed and will never

return to wrong you. Tell me if this is satisfactory?" To a woman who was at her correspondent's mercy in so terrible a way, we should say that it was eminently satisfactory. We should say that it savoured of a very Bedlam of virtue.

It hardly redeems Lady Byron's conduct from mystery to show, as Lord Lovelace attempts with some success to do, that she was convinced that there had been no repetition of the offence after her marriage, but it may be allowed to make it one degree less unaccountable. This process would be still a little further advanced if she could, in addition, be shown to have so far satisfied herself about this as not to have considered it a necessary cause for separation, and in fact not to have so treated it. Sir John Fox, therefore, says that Lord Lovelace had not only discredited Mrs. Stowe as to Lady Byron's belief in the renewal of the offence when Augusta was staying in her house, but that the whole drift of his book, *Astarte*, goes to prove that it was not this offence at all that decided Lady Byron in her conduct. In support of this suggestion he quotes Lord Lovelace as saying, "That there was some potent necessity for the separation was really put beyond a doubt by the well-known agreement of opinion between three such men as Sir Robert Wilmot Horton, Sir Francis Doyle, and Dr. Lushington." Lord Lovelace proceeds from this passage to say that "*some* obstacle to reunion of exceptional gravity must have been known to them," and adds that "all alternative explanations, graduating from murder down to bigamy, are more heinous or repulsive than incest with a half-sister, the senior by four years, met again almost as a stranger after many years' absence without correspondence." Whatever may be thought of the views here advanced, it is difficult to see how Sir John Fox supposes that they bring Lord Lovelace to the support of the argument he is submitting. But when he puts forward the "disavowal" above mentioned,[1] and is further able to publish for the first time the report of a conversation (of a Mr. Bathurst)

[1] This document which Hobhouse refers to as having been shown to him by Wilmot (see above) is printed by Sir John Fox as from the Earl of Lovelace's papers, to which he had access by the courtesy of the Countess of Lovelace. These papers were the material from which *Astarte* was compiled; it is curious that so important a piece of evidence should not be mentioned in that book.

with Dr. Lushington, in which the latter says that "brutally indecent conduct and language" towards Lady Byron were to be the charges against Byron in the contemplated divorce proceedings, but that no attempt would have been made to prove incest, partly because of the difficulty of producing evidence, he may claim to make his point, for what it is worth; which, we must say, does not seem to be very much. We have just seen that Lord Lovelace, reflecting the mind of Lushington and others, speaks of an "obstacle to reunion of exceptional gravity," which points to some offence not commonly pleaded in divorce proceedings; we have seen also what Lord Lovelace considers this offence to have been. Hobhouse tells us that Byron's friends agreed at the time of the crisis that his assailants ought if possible to be forced to define clearly the nature of the charge that they alleged was "too horrid to mention." [1] We should, therefore, expect Sir John Fox to advance some other cause of an unusual character to replace the one that he dismisses. He recognises this necessity, and meets it in a way that seems to deprive the point that he has been so careful to establish of any weight that it might have. He proceeds to admit that the very indecency of conduct and language of which Byron was to be accused was inspired precisely by his infatuation for Augusta, and concludes: "This conduct and other acts of cruelty constituted the 'potent necessity' for the separation, and were the 'direct cause' of it—the crime of incest was not the cause." There may be some legal distinction here, but any advantage that may have been secured to Lady Byron's cause in the court of common sense escapes us.

To return to Byron's own evidence in the matter, we find first that he states that he is willing to face investigation. Hobhouse confirms this by saying not merely that he believes his friend is ready to do this, but that "Lord Byron made every preparation [under Hobhouse's observation and direction] for *going into court*, and contemplated not waiting for any proceedings on the part of his wife's family, but himself immediately *citing* her Ladyship to return to her conjugal duty," [2] and he adds that

[1] Hobhouse, 1870, p. 177.
[2] Hobhouse, 1870, p. 105.

Byron's legal advisers approved of this intention. We find, secondly, Byron's profession that he did not know what was the charge against him so far supported by the other side that they pretended at least that it was not what we know in substance it was. This pretence, apart from its psychological use to the Lady Byron party subsequently, was looked upon as an important legal precaution at the time; "Dr. L. said he declined to show his cards and name anything, for obvious reasons."[1] Thirdly, there is the statement drawn up by Byron in Venice, 1817, and given to M. G. Lewis. Attempts have been made to throw suspicion on this manifesto, but no more substantially than by a reflection upon Byron's general incredibility as a witness, a method that it must in fairness be allowed is somewhat naturally employed by both parties to the dispute. But the statement in itself is a lucid and dispassionate one, made nearly eighteen months after the first heat of the controversy had passed, and it is entitled to as much consideration as any other mere assertion coming from either principal in the case. The statement, omitting some inessential passages, is as follows:

It has been intimated to me that the . . . legal advisers of Lady Byron had declared "their lips to be sealed up." . . . If their lips are sealed up, they are not sealed up by me, and the greatest favour *they* can confer on me is to open them. From the first . . . I called repeatedly and in vain for a statement of . . . her charges, and it was chiefly in consequence of Lady Byron's claiming . . . a promise on my part to consent to a separation . . . that I consented at all; this claim . . . induced me reluctantly then, and repentantly still, to sign the deed, which I shall be happy, most happy, to cancel, and go before any tribunal which may discuss the business in the most public manner.

Mr. Hobhouse made the proposition on my part, viz.: to abrogate all prior intentions and go into court, the very day before the separation was signed, and it was declined by the other party, as also the publication of the correspondence during the previous discussion. Those propositions I beg here to repeat and to call upon her and hers to say their worst, pledging myself to meet their allegations—whatever they may be—and only too happy to be informed at last of their real nature.

[1] Bathurst, above quoted.

P.S.—I have been and am now utterly ignorant of what description her allegations . . . are; and am as little aware for what purpose they have been kept back—unless it was to sanction the most infamous calumnies by silence.

This statement calls for examination. Lord Ernle is caught up sharply by Sir John Fox for attaching any importance to Byron's explanation as here recorded of the circumstances in which he agreed to the separation. Sir John Fox allows that Byron made the statement, but denies the truth of it. He says: "Lord Byron complains that he did not know what the charges against him were. If he did know what the charges were, the promise implied an admission that they were true; if he did not know, the promise provided an excuse for not inquiring further into the truth of facts which he dared not face." This is too flagrantly a case of heads I win tails you lose to need comment. The plain fact is that Byron said that he consented to separation only because his wife urged him to do so instead of going into court, that he continued to assert that he did not know why she desired the separation, and that he was willing, indeed eager, to face a public investigation on the matter at any time. It may be claimed that in saying this he was "bamming," but that he said it is beyond dispute, and the fact that he said it means that no one is justified in charging him with evading an issue by a promise in making which Sir John Fox says, "he was only too willing to take advantage of the excuse." The statement says that he was as far from willing as reluctance could be, and it says that he regretted the promise and its consequences, and wanted publicly to repudiate his own conspiracy of silence. We should, if there were no corroboration of this view of the statement, be as justified in holding that Byron was speaking truthfully in it as in accepting the unsupported claim of his opponents that he was lying. But there happens to be corroboration of the strongest kind.

John Cam Hobhouse will come into our narrative at several points, and it will be convenient for that reason, and as touching upon the value of his evidence, to give some indication of his character in this place. Two years older than Byron, he was

with him at Trinity, Cambridge, and, as the poet tells us in a letter written some years later, "after hating me for two years, because I wore a *white* hat, and a *grey* coat, and rode a grey horse (as he himself says), took me into his good graces because I had written some poetry. I had always lived a good deal, and got drunk occasionally, in [his] company—but now we became really friends in a morning." The friendship thus founded lasted, with an occasional strain, until Byron's death. In 1809 Hobhouse published through Longman a volume of poems entitled, *Imitations and Translations from the Ancient and Modern Classics. Together with Original Poems never before published.* The book, which is distinguished by a list of over fifty *errata* in two hundred and fifty pages, consists chiefly of Hobhouse's own work, but among the original poems are nine pieces by Byron. Hobhouse himself was no duffer at making verses, but his best contribution to the book is the preface, in which he glances shrewdly at the protestations of poets in giving their works to the world:

> One "can no longer withstand the repeated solicitations of his friends." Another "has incautiously suffered too many copies of his compositions to get about, and must, therefore, print in his own vindication to prevent a surreptitious and incorrect edition." A third "has written most of his pieces when very young; and, being unwilling to deceive the public into a false opinion of his early prowess by the correctness of his mature judgment, has e'en sent them into the world just as they were originally produced, and, therefore, trusts he shall meet with every indulgence." . . . This gentleman has been maliciously reported to be the author of some scurrilous lampoons and indecent poems; and therefore, to show how incapable he is of such an impropriety, and how little his mind has ever taken such a turn, boldly gives to the world *Five Satires* and *A Tale from Boccace.*

The volume, which Charles Skinner Matthews, another Cambridge friend, called the *Miss-sell-any*, escaped the attention of the public, and Hobhouse in his journal tells us that he "soon became heartily ashamed" of it. About the time of its publication Hobhouse joined Byron in the first of his pilgrimages, travelling with him through Greece and Albania. The arrange-

ment on the whole seems to have been an agreeable one, though, when the friends parted at the end of a year, Byron writes: "I am for Greece, Hobhouse for England. A year together on the 2nd July since we sailed from Falmouth. I have known a hundred instances of men setting out in couples, but not one of a similar return. . . . I am confident that twelve months of any given individual is perfect ipecacuanha," and again, a few days later, "The Marquis of Sligo, my old fellow-collegian, is here, and wishes to accompany me into the Morea. We shall go together for that purpose; but I am woefully sick of travelling companions, after a year's experience of Mr. Hobhouse, who is on his way to Great Britain." Four years later, however, when Byron is contemplating a second journey in the event of Miss Milbanke refusing him, which he anticipates, he writes to Hobhouse, "Will you come with me? You are the only man with whom I could travel an hour except an ἰατρός; in short you know, my dear H., that with all my bad qualities (and d——d bad they are to be sure) I like you better than anybody—and we have travelled together before, and been old friends, and all that, and we have a thorough fellow feeling, and contempt for all things of a sublunary sort—so do let us go and call the 'Pantheon a cockpit,' like the learned Smelfungus." To Lady Melbourne Byron refers to Hobhouse as "a cynic after my own heart."

Hobhouse was Byron's best man at his wedding, his constant adviser and agent in business transactions, a prominent member of the Greek committee in England that worked with Byron in his last enterprise, and one of the executors named in the poet's will. It was he who superintended the removal of Byron's body from Standgate Creek through London to burial at Hucknall Torkard. Byron may have been little enough fastidious in his choice of acquaintances at times, but he recognised character when he wanted to, and he clearly liked Hobhouse and knew that he could trust his loyalty and rely on his judgment. Hobhouse, for his part, has some reputation as the frankest of Byron's friends, an opinion that Byron himself supported by saying, "He was the most impartial, or perhaps unpartial, of my friends; he always told me my faults, but I must do him the justice to

add, that he told them to *me*, and not to others." But even Hobhouse, with all his candour, was just a little subdued at times to the personality that no man but Shelley was ever able to stand up to on quite equal terms. That he had a deep affection for Byron we know from all his conduct, and we observe a shade of almost over-tinged emotion in such entries from his journal as "I saw and joined my dearest Byron in a private box," and "Passed the evening with Byron, who put the last hand to his *Childe Harold*, and took leave of my dear friend, for so I think him, at twelve o'clock. . . . God bless him!" and "Lord Byron, whom I love more and more every day, not so much from his fame as his fondness—I think not equivocal—for me. . . ." This Boswellian note is emphasised in an entry dated March 26th, 1815:

> I passed the morning . . . in a foolish state of apprehension with respect to Byron, my friend Byron, whose silence annoys me beyond what I can express. I wish I had done something besides good; having nothing but right on my side, I cannot help looking on myself as a wretched individual whom it is not worth while to conciliate on the most advantageous terms. By the God that made me, I cannot guess at the grounds of this behaviour. He must be mad! He tells me in a letter that nothing short of insanity can alter his opinion of me. Well, even if we quarrel some good will arise: he is my friend, and I shall have the opportunity of showing the virtue of forbearance.

and then, March 27th, "Heard from Byron: all my suspicions groundless." In this connection one other incident may be mentioned. In 1820 Byron sent to Murray from Vienna a squib in which he pilloried "My boy Hobby" for what he took to be some political delinquency. He wrote it when he thought Hobhouse was safely through an election that occasioned the jest (? a very mild one), and sent it privately to Murray; but the thing was captured by a newspaper. Hobhouse assumed that it was aimed at him in a critical moment of his political fortunes, and in any case took umbrage and toyed with the idea of repudiating his attachment. Byron was roused to one of his best letters, and told his chafing friend, in terms that exactly measured their rela-

tionship, "You were not '*down*,' but 700 ahead in the *poll* when I lampooned you. I had scrawled it before the election began, but waited till you were or appeared sure . . . before I sent to *you* what would have been a sorry jest had you failed; it would then have been ill-natured; as it was, it was buffoonery, and this, you know, has been all along our mutual privilege. When I left England *you* made those precious lines on Murray and Douglas [Kinnaird] and yr humble servt., and in 1808 you put me into prose at Brighthelmstone about Jackson. . . . Do you remember Capt. Bathurst's nautical anecdote of the boatswain shooting the Frenchman who asked for quarter while running down the hatchway, 'No, no, you ——, you fired first'? As for the Moray, he had no business whatever to put the lines in peril of publication. I desired him to give them to *you*, and their *signature* must have showed you in what spirit they were written. . . ." And, resuming the subject two months later, he says: "Did you not begin first? . . . My payment, with interest, was merely to have talked to you of your speeches . . . in the same style you bestowed upon me in your epistle, and see how you liked it. But I can't go on with such nonsense, nor squabble about anything of the kind, that is to say, in earnest."

Thus it will be seen that Byron treated Hobhouse with confidence and affection, but sometimes also with a little indulgence, as knowing himself to be the better wit and brain. Hobhouse in after-life achieved a very honourable and courageous political career, receiving a barony in 1851, and being present at the first Council of Queen Victoria, inventing, it is said, the phrase, "Her Majesty's Opposition." [1] His portrait shows him as a firm-lipped Victorian, heavily featured and clear-eyed, with a turn of expression that is on the point of lapsing from a disdainful integrity into smugness. We have seen, in his affair with Dallas, that he was no safer than other good men if pushed into a corner, but he was in the sum a witness whose evidence would gain the respect of any tribunal.

And Hobhouse's evidence about Byron's separation from his wife has the especial value of being given from immediate con-

[1] Lord Ernle, vol. i, p. 164.

tact with the event. During the turbulent days of January, February, and March, 1816, he was with Byron on terms of the closest intimacy, coming and going at all hours, and a principal at all the critical conferences. If Byron throughout this period was fooling him, he was fooling a man whom he liked better perhaps than any other, who was a keen observer of what was going on about him, and who was placed in these particular circumstances in a position of exceptional advantage for coming to just conclusions. And Hobhouse's narrative, written, as has been said, within easy range of the events themselves, makes it abundantly clear that he believed Byron to be at once ignorant of the reason that was controlling Lady Byron in her action, and innocent of the graver charge that rumour was making against him. This narrative, privately printed in 1870 and openly published in 1909, would, if it stood by itself, establish a case for Byron convincing at all points, both by its own substance and the character of the deponent. It does not stand by itself, and the witnesses against it are, it must be freely allowed, extremely difficult to dismiss. But in certain essential matters its testimony still holds the field against any insinuation, and not least convincingly upon this point of the precise temper in which Byron yielded to his wife's desire that the separation should be by private agreement and not contingent upon the verdict of a public court. The substance of Hobhouse's account of this aspect of the case is as follows.

Lord Holland had written to Byron early in March 1816, very tactfully offering to act as intermediary. "Lord Byron, previously to the receipt of this letter, had endeavoured to see Lady Byron—indeed at one time he had actually ordered his carriage to take him to Mivart's Hotel at six o'clock, so entirely was he convinced that an interview would give him a very good chance of arranging the whole affair. However, he was afraid that his abrupt presence might occasion some distress, and determined first to write to her Ladyship, which he did in affectionate terms, entreating she would see him." To this request Lady Byron sent a curt refusal, dated from Mivart's, but added that an interview must subject her much harassed feelings to a "still

more distressing trial." This phrase, Hobhouse tells us, encouraged Byron's friends to hope that Lady Byron was about to relent, and further advances were made, but unsuccessfully. Byron, thereupon, saw Lord Holland, and received through him a proposal from Lady Byron on financial matters which incensed him as seeming to imply that he was in any case doing very well out of the marriage. He then wrote (March 4th) to his wife asserting his ignorance of her charges against him and adding that he knew of no offence that he could be supposed to have committed which should not be expiated by his repeated offers of atonement. He goes on, "but since all hope is over, and instead of the duties of a wife and the mother of my child, I am to encounter accusation and implacability, I have nothing more to say, but shall act according to circumstances, though not even injury can alter the love with which (though I shall do my best to repel attack) I must be ever yours, B." At this stage in the proceedings there was an almost hourly interchange of messages and proposals between the two parties, Byron continuing to "protest to his legal advisers and his friends that, unless a total oblivion had surprised him of all that had happened, during his marriage, *it was absolutely false that he had been guilty of any enormity—that nothing could or would be proved by anybody against him, and that he was prepared for anything that could be said in any court*," [1] Lady Byron closely refraining from making any direct open statement, but "persevering in her tone and the style which . . . gave every latitude to conjecture, and was more injurious to his Lordship even than the designation of an individual offence." On March 5th, the day following the date of the last letter quoted, Lady Byron was to give her final answer to Byron's proposal that they should come to "some amicable arrangement short of a separation," and Hobhouse at this moment wrote to her with a view to influencing her decision. After a general preamble he says:

I most solemnly avow myself entirely ignorant, after the most serious and repeated enquiries, of any delinquency which

[1] The italics are Hobhouse's.

can deserve the affliction apparently meditated as the fit return of the conduct of Lord Byron towards your ladyship. . . . You owe it to yourself to provide against the repetition of that behaviour of which you complain;[1] but you owe it to Lord Byron . . . to make that provision by any means, rather than those which must risk . . . the misery of yourself, and your husband, and your child.

While an answer to this letter was being awaited, Byron's counsel were in conference, and an immediate citation of Lady Byron was in dispute between them on one side, and Byron and his friends on the other, Byron wishing first to be finally assured that his wife would proceed to extreme measures. His legal advisers held that if she did it would be a technical advantage to him to have made the first move, while Byron was anxious not to force her into the court whether she would or no by his own action. The position all round smacks a little of legal quibbling it must be allowed, but lawyers were partly in control on both sides by this time. What is perfectly clear is that Byron was sincerely anxious for an amicable settlement, and eager not to destroy the possibility of this by legal precipitancy, and that at the same time he was willing and fully prepared to go into court if necessary rather than submit to a separation dictated by a wife who declined either to come back to him or say why she was leaving him.

Later in the day Lady Byron's answer to Hobhouse was delivered. She is still firmly for separation, but Hobhouse's claim that it is "by far the mildest of all her epistles" on the subject is justified. "Without doubting the justice of my cause," says Lady Byron, "I have no hesitation in acknowledging my reluctance to have recourse to any other mode of redress, whilst a possibility remains of obtaining the end with your [Hobhouse's, as acting for Byron] consent. And after your repeated assertions that when convinced my conduct has not been influenced by others, you should not oppose my wishes, I am yet disposed to hope those assertions will be realised." Hobhouse continues:

1 Byron's generally inconsiderate conduct at the time of Lady Byron's confinement. This was admitted, and will be referred to in the main story. It had nothing to do with the graver charge.

The receipt of (this letter) not a little altered the position of the respective parties to the eyes of Lord Byron and his friends. The tone of aggression was dropped against him; and her Ladyship, instead of menacing judicial proceedings against a person anxious to avoid them, was here rather a suppliant for a private arrangement with one who had given every demonstration that he should prefer a public investigation of the whole affair. His Lordship had done enough to show that *he was afraid of no exposure*, and having thus given his friends the only guarantee which the mysterious silence of his antagonists would allow him, of his own innocence, he was justified in weighing the *petition* of his wife—for petition it may be called—and in comparing the expediency of a refusal and of a compliance with her entreaties.

Hobhouse goes on to say that Byron had at first been disposed to accede to his wife's demand if he could be convinced that it really came from herself and not, as he suspected, from outside influence; but that this inclination left him when it became necessary to defend himself against the specific rumours that arose. Lady Byron had now made it clear that she had acted upon her own responsibility, and further she had now, "first by communication with his own family and at last by letter, made every entreaty, and finally appealed to his honour for a private arrangement," and Byron at last felt himself at liberty to consult her wishes.

The next step was to obtain from Lady Byron an explicit statement upon the damaging rumours, and this being done in the manner already told, the way was clear for the private agreement by which the separation was ultimately effected.

This, then, is how the matter appeared to Hobhouse, and, all things considered, while it leaves Byron still answerable to any further evidence that may be advanced against him on the main charge, the story as we here have it quite effectively disposes of Sir John Fox's gratuitous assertion that Byron, in saying that he consented to a private separation because his wife wished it and not because he feared a public examination, was lying. It is possible that Byron was concealing something essential about past events from his best friend, and that this fact escaped detection even under that friend's very thorough scrutiny when,

as Hobhouse himself tells us, he examined with the strictest impartiality every potential witness who could be found. But that Byron could hoodwink this same friend, who was constantly at his side on the most familiar terms, as to his moods and actions or even as to his governing motives at the time itself, is not humanly credible. Hobhouse's opinion as to what Byron had done or not done in the past remains his opinion only, founded it is true on exceptional knowledge of facts and of Byron's character, but still subject to dissent. But his account of what Byron actually did during the critical days of negotiation, and why he did it, is explicit and convincing, and no evidence whatever has yet been put forward to discredit it.

3

There is here one other point to be mentioned. Attempts have been freely made to cite Byron in evidence against himself by means of his poetry. We are told by Lord Lovelace and others with great elaboration that in *Manfred*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *The Giaour*, and I know not what poems besides, Byron plainly convicts himself because incest is in some measure or another their thematic material. Great pains are taken to support this proposition by cross-references between the poems and Byron's letters. These devices will not be analysed here, because they are merely a corruption of all decent argument. A poet may very well tell us a great deal about himself in his poems, about his character, his emotional nature, his opinions, his habits, and even his comings and goings, and no poet has ever done this more freely than Byron. But to use his poetry as incriminating evidence against him in any specific circumstance in his life is utterly offensive to the propriety of criticism, and convicts the transgressor of entire ignorance as to the processes of which he speaks. There can be no compromise on this matter. Particular stress is laid by Byron's accusers on the song, "I speak not, I trace not, I breathe not, thy name." The personal occasion that seems to attach to this poem makes it not one whit more eligible for these improper purposes. If Byron had written a song

on bridal sleep and addressed it "To Augusta," it might have been grossly crude of him, but it would still have been wholly inadmissible as evidence on the particular charge that his poetry is made to support. Byron's poetry is inexhaustible in its revelation of the man, but it is discreditable and misleading to pervert it from that function to the uses of police-court evidence.

Byron's own testimony is yet far from complete, as we shall see, but it will be convenient here to leave it for a time. We have now to approach the problem in an entirely different aspect, and see more closely what we make of Lady Byron.

4

And let this be said at once, that, whatever we may consider her faults of temper and conduct to have been, she was very unhandsomely used by fate. It is idle to speculate upon the possibility of any woman having been able to make marriage with Byron a tolerable venture; but, if the ideal woman for making it intolerable had to be elected by a miserable chance, Lady Byron was the perfect choice. She was at first undoubtedly greatly attracted by Byron; it may even be said that she was in love with him. But she was by no means precipitate in accepting him. He proposed to her when he was twenty-four, and she refused him. The girl of twenty showed already something of the prudent deliberation that was to take on so grim a complexion later. "In fact," says Mrs. Stowe sympathetically, "she already loved him, but had that doubt of her power to be to him all that a wife should be which would be likely to arise in a mind so sensitively constituted and so unworldly." Byron admired her: at the time of the first proposal he tells his friend, her aunt, Lady Melbourne, that whomever he *may* marry that is the woman he would wish to have married. "As to *love*, that is done in a week (provided the lady has a reasonable share); besides, marriage goes on better with esteem and confidence than romance, and she is quite pretty enough to be loved by her husband, without being so glaringly beautiful as to attract too many rivals." But already he calls her his Princess of Parallelograms.

A correspondence went on between them after his rejection, but Byron is clear that it will never be anything more than an acquaintance, "even if she *revoked*." Two years later he changed his mind, proposed again, and this time was accepted. He is said to have told her at the time of the marriage that if she had known her own mind at first it would have saved him a good many scrapes—an observation that may have been as true as it was ungracious. Byron's admiration suffered no diminution, we are sure, by the first refusal; but between that time and his second proposal, however warmly his esteem may have survived, he was engaged in a variety of intrigues, as we shall see, and he renewed his offer to Miss Milbanke, there is no doubt, largely in the hope of cutting himself clear of entanglements and finding some fixed influence upon a life that he knew was drifting dangerously and without aim. He returned to her, in short, in a mood of satiety and worldly disillusion. She was still fascinated by his charm, his reputation, and his talents, and for a moment she seems to have been inspired with the idea that she could save him. She overcame her scruples, and accepted him, and never could a union have been more disastrously planned. A girl of austere moral instinct, coldly doctrinaire in principle, sensitive to the prestige of genius, but wholly unprepared for its excesses, rigid alike in her severities and graces of character, and allowing no margin in life for adventure, she married a man weary alike of self-indulgence and of discipline, possessed by a demoniac energy that could neither control nor spend itself, torn between the extremes of cynicism and generosity. Any woman might be excused for falling in love with him, but no woman could be expected to marry him unless she were a fool, or recklessly infatuated, or quite sure of qualities in herself equal to this almost hopeless responsibility. Miss Milbanke was none of these things. She was certainly no fool; her emotions were probably as deeply stirred by Byron as they could have been by any one, but infatuation was not a condition possible to her nature; while it is certain that she had no more than the faintest perception of what the responsibility, for them both, really was. And yet she married him. It needs little imagination to realise what the

shock to such a woman, twenty years of age, of the impact of matrimonial relations with such a man must have been. The mistake was realised almost at once, and although for a few months there was some accommodation of temper, Lady Byron's mind soon began to accustom itself to the merciless designs of outraged virtue.

They were married on January 2nd, 1815. The only child of the marriage was born on December 10th following, at their house, 13 Piccadilly Terrace. On January 6th, 1816, Byron, who was admittedly by this time behaving as anything but a reformed character, sent a note to his wife suggesting that as soon as convenient to herself—"the sooner you can fix on the day the better—though of course, your convenience and inclination shall be first consulted"—she should go with her child to stay with her parents in the country. Lady Byron's account of this event, embodied in a memorandum drawn up at the time that Moore's *Life* was to be published in 1830, says, "It has been argued that I parted from Lord Byron in perfect harmony; that feelings, incompatible with any deep sense of injury, had dictated the letter which I addressed to him; and that my sentiments must have been changed by persuasion and interference, when I was under the roof of my parents. These assertions and inferences are wholly destitute of foundation." Lord Lovelace takes Byron's letter to his wife as proof that he wanted to "cast her off." Byron himself, in a letter to his wife's father, Sir Ralph Noel, written on February 2nd, 1816, and first published by Hobhouse in 1870, says: "Lady Byron received no dismissal from my house in the sense you have attached to the word. She left London by medical advice. She parted from me in apparent and, on my part, real harmony, though at that particular time, rather against my inclination, for I begged her to remain with the intention of myself accompanying her. . . . It is true that previous to this period I had suggested to her the expediency of a temporary residence with her parents. My reason for this was very simple and shortly stated, viz., the embarrassment of my circumstances, and my inability to maintain our present establishment."

Whatever the respective truth of these versions may be, Lady

Byron left London on January 15th, having first engaged a doctor to report to her upon her husband's mental condition. On her journey into the country she wrote a letter to Byron in candidly affectionate terms; on arriving at Kirkby the next day, January 16th, she wrote another that, although it has become a classic, must be reproduced here:

Dearest Duck,

We got here quite well last night, and were ushered into the Kitchen instead of the drawing-room, by a mistake that might have been agreeable enough to hungry people. . . . Of this and other incidents Dad wants to write you a jocose account and both he and Mam long to have the family party completed. . . . Such . . . ! and such a *sitting*-room or *sulking*-room all to yourself. If I were not always looking about for B. I should be a great deal better already for country air. *Miss* finds her provision increased and fattens thereon. It is a good thing she can't understand all the flattery bestowed upon her—"Little Angel" and I know not what. . . . Love to the good goose and everybody's love to you both from hence.

Ever thy most loving

Pippin . . . Pip . . . Ip.

The good goose was Augusta Leigh, to whom Lady Byron on the same day wrote two long and extremely affectionate letters, in the middle of one of which she says, "My dearest A., it is my great comfort that you are in Piccadilly."

In less than a week Lady Byron heard from the doctor that Dearest Duck was by no means mad, and thereupon behaved in a very unexpected way. She had told her parents that his conduct had lately been such as to make her fear for his mental balance, and on the 17th her mother had written to him asking him to come down to join his wife in the peace and restorative airs of Kirkby. Now, finding that after all he was sane, she declared that she could never be induced to return to a man who could behave as he had done if he was responsible for his actions, and from this resolution she never budged from that moment.

The causes of complaint that she had laid against Byron to her parents did not include her suspicion, which she afterwards [1]

[1] In her attested statement, sworn before Lushington and others, dated March 14th, 1816. *Astarte,* p. 142.

said already existed, of unnatural relations with Augusta; and when Lady Noel travelled to London on January 20th to attempt the negotiation of settlement terms, she did so with her daughter's authority to take legal opinion on certain facts, but with partial knowledge only, Lady Byron telling us that she still had "reasons for reserving a part of the case from the knowledge even of my father and mother." It may be noted here that in her statement of 1830 above mentioned, Lady Byron says that Byron at first rejected the proposal for an "amicable separation," but that "when it was distinctly notified to him, that if he persisted in his refusal, recourse must be had to legal measures, he agreed to sign a deed of separation." The reliability of this assertion has been tested by Hobhouse's account.

5

The subsequent progress of the separation proceedings has already been indicated. And now we come to a phase of the story that, decide the facts to be what we will, must remain one of the most bewildering manifestations of human complexity on record. Lady Byron's relations with Augusta have been glanced at, with some perplexity, but from the time of Lady Byron's departure from London they became steadily more incomprehensible by any normal standards of conduct; they do, indeed, almost beggar belief. Correspondence between the two women was constant. Lady Byron's two letters to Augusta of the 16th were followed by two others on the 18th, two more on the 19th, one on the 20th, one on the 23rd, and so on for some weeks, when there is a lull, to be accounted for by Lushington's advice that, in view of the prevalent rumours, Lady Byron should at least suspend relations with Augusta. After a time he withdrew this advice on Lady Byron's own representation that any open break would be deeply injurious to Augusta's reputation, which, she asserted, she was anxious to protect in every way possible. Lady Byron's letters of January and February are written uniformly in terms of the utmost affection and confidence, anxious for reports as to Byron's condition, full of assurances of gratitude and esteem, and Au-

gusta's replies from the first are in the same spirit, with a difference, as we shall see. The deed of separation was signed on April 21st; on the 25th Byron left England, and the correspondence between the sisters-in-law was resumed.

The position at the moment was this. Lady Byron, with a short interval of silence, had been writing to Augusta as to her truest and most cherished friend; at the same time she not only had terrible suspicions in her mind about her, but she was committing these suspicions to paper in the presence of witnesses. The suggestion that she knew Augusta to be guilty, but believed in her repentance and loved her with undiminished warmth, has no countenance whatever from the letters themselves; and nothing can ever reconcile the writing of these letters with the sworn testimony of March 14th. If Lady Byron in January-February *knew* Augusta to be guilty it was gravely misleading of her to swear in March to a statement that repeatedly asserts that her mind is still suspicious only, though not very seriously so.[1] If, on the other hand, she was *suspicious* only, but suspicious to this extent, and had not brought the question openly to issue with Augusta, it was a very odd notion of honour that allowed her to write letters that not only gave no hint of her black misgivings, but were positive in their assertion of sisterly regard. A great deal may properly be allowed for the effect upon Lady Byron of the miserable crisis through which she was passing; but a great deal certainly needs to be allowed.

And now in May the confusion thickens. We will find our way through it as directly as possible. A friend of Augusta's, the Honourable Mrs. Villiers, seems to have discredited the ugly rumours until this date, when she met Lady Byron and enlightenment. "The two women," we learn from *Astarte*, "appear to have been irresistibly drawn to each other." We are reminded of the Mrs. Stowe of thirty years later, and indeed Mrs. Villiers takes her place as by right in that formidable trinity. These confidences exchanged, there ensued a three-cornered correspondence

[1] The purpose of this statement was to make it clear, if "Mrs. L. should be proved hereafter to be guilty," that Lady Byron had preserved relations with her only to avoid any possibility of doing a great injustice upon insufficient confirmation of her suspicions.

between Lady Byron, Mrs. Villiers, and Augusta, that makes Scapin himself seem nonconformist. The reader must be asked to follow us with some care through its salient passages; we shall summarise as freely as possible.[1]

May 6th, 1816.—Lady Byron to Mrs. Villiers: "I should have great consolation in thinking that A. was more deluded than deceiving in the opinion she now declares—for, to me, duplicity is the most unpardonable crime. . . . My great object, next to the Security of my Child, is . . . the restoration of her [Augusta's] mind to that state which is religiously desirable. . . . Perhaps no human power can create the spirit of humility and repentance which I pray God to bestow upon her. . . . Whatever may be the intermediate circumstances, it will be in her power to reclaim my friendship whenever it can really serve her for more than worldly purposes—to speak seriously as I feel, I regard this as a Christian duty . . ." and so on, throughout a morass of equivocation, innuendo, and, as it must seem, self-righteous and complacent cunning. There is a P.S. to this letter. "My late maid's trunks, when opened in consequence of the execution, were found to contain divers stolen goods—so much for the respectable witness!"

May 9th.—Mrs. Villiers to Lady Byron: "Nothing can be more amiable than all your feelings towards poor A., and I trust the time will come when she will fully appreciate them. Her fever has not yet subsided—and the wretched condition of her own affairs must, and will for a time, prevent all retrospective recollections turning to good account. . . . The anecdote of your maid is *very satisfactory*—I never thought much faith shd. be given to her evidence; but this ought to be known. Always believe me very affectionately yours, T. V."

May 12th.—Lady Byron to Mrs. Villiers: "There was no medium—I must either have treated her as guilty or innocent—My *Instinct* too strongly dictated the former, but the *evidence then* rested chiefly on his words and manners, and her *otherwise* unaccountable assent and submission to both. . . . During her

[1] The letters in full will be found in the second edition of *Astarte*, 1921, chapters ix and x.

last visit my suspicions as to *previous* circumstances were most strongly corroborated—above all by *her* confessions and admissions when in a state of despair and distraction. They were of the most unequivocal nature possible, *unless she had expressly named the subject of her remorse and horror.*" [1]

May 18th.—Mrs. Villiers to Lady Byron: ". . . The object must now be to reduce her tone again from pride to penitence—and to produce a change in her feelings for her own sake as well as for that of others." Augusta has assured the writer that the reports that Byron had himself given colour to the scandal by his loose way of talking in public were false, but she (Mrs. Villiers) has had no difficulty in disposing of this ingenuousness by retorting that "two years ago he had advanced at Holland House the most extraordinary theory upon such subjects." A passage follows which reminds us of Du Maurier's remark that Whistler had written him a letter of abuse in all the French he knew and all the English he didn't, and then, "The general impression, as far as I am a judge, is so perfectly *now* what it should be—a very judicious letter of yours which I have seen circulated respecting Ld. B.'s systematic cruelty has done much good."

May 23rd.—Lady Byron to Mrs. Villiers: "The measure which I propose to take appears to me to unite the following advantages—that it will make *herself* acquainted with my real opinions and feelings, without binding me to avow them publicly, should she be desperate in the first impulse—that it will nevertheless suspend this terror over her, to be used as her future dispositions and conduct may render expedient—whilst it leaves her the power of profiting by my forbearance, without compelling the utterly degrading confession of her own guilt. . . ." And then, gently reminding Mrs. Villers that she has put her foot in it, "I do not know what letter of mine can have been shown about, as I never wrote any on the subject that I did not mean to be private, though I have no doubt it was circulated with the soundest intentions."

June 3rd.—Lady Byron to Mrs. Leigh: A letter saying that intercourse between them must be limited, that she deeply laments this "consequence of causes . . . if your feelings towards me

[1] The italics are ours, not Lady Byron's.

could give me the power of doing you any good," which on account of Augusta's openly expressed resentment against Lady Byron's partisans they could not, but—"may the blessing of God be with you . . . and should your present unhappy dispositions be seriously changed, you will not then be deceived in considering me as one who will afford every service and consolation of your most faithful friend—A. I. Byron." Subjoined to this letter is an ominous note:

"KIRKBY, *June* 3, 1816.—I attest this to be a true copy of a letter from Lady Byron to Mrs. Leigh. . . .—RALPH NOEL."

June 4th.—Lady Byron to Mrs. Villiers: "Our present unanimity of opinion is a great comfort to me. . . ." She forwards a summary of her letter to Augusta. She would enclose a copy, but she may wish to say that she has not given one.

June 8th.—Mrs. Villiers to Lady Byron: Mrs. Villiers has heard from Augusta, who said nothing of Lady Byron's letter of the 3rd; she may be presumed, therefore, to have taken it as she ought, "quietly at least—and if quietly surely it must be gratefully."

June 6th.—Mrs. Leigh to Lady Byron: Augusta is not taking it so quietly after all, but she is taking it very unaccountably. The letter is a long one, and, whether purposely or not, nebulous in its contents. Augusta admits that she is in some unspecified way at the mercy of her sister-in-law—"*for the sake of my children* [I am compelled] to accept from your *compassion* the 'limited intercourse' which is all you can grant. . . ." But to "general accusations" she can only answer in "general terms," and "the time may come when your present convictions and opinions will change." Two important things are clear in this letter, first that Augusta is not throwing Lady Byron's insinuations[1] back in her face, as she might be expected to do if she knew and could prove them to be false, and secondly that she confesses nothing, and does not write as having confessed anything in the past. In this letter Augusta's behaviour is, as it remained, extremely ambiguous.

[1] It must be borne in mind, however, that though we may now believe them to have been of a specific kind, there is nothing in Lady Byron's letter of the 3rd to make it certain that we are right.

June 15th.—Lady Byron to Mrs. Villiers: Augusta has been disappointing—she acquiesces, she clearly understands Lady Byron, but "of course she does not plead guilty." However, Lady Byron is much affected by having to correspond on altered terms with one whom she has not ceased to love.

June 19th.—Mrs. Villiers to Lady Byron: Mrs. Villiers is much relieved; continued silence on Augusta's part as to Lady Byron's letter has made her fear that she might be turning sulky, and, moreover, Mrs. Villiers has hardly been sure what she is supposed to know . . . "absolute silence on *my* part at such a moment was almost a tacit avowal of my knowledge of what was passing, and, as it was for *her sake* desirable that this should not appear"—Mrs. Villiers has pretended that Lady Byron has been no doubt too busy to write the letter a summary of which Mrs. Villiers had all the time in her reticule. She doubts Augusta's change of heart, though her admissions [which the two ladies now sanguinely take as accepted facts] will make a renewal of her relations with Byron—who is now "living at Geneva in such bad company. . . . I wish from my soul that he may be so occupied with fresh pursuits as to neglect her entirely"—very difficult. Mrs. Villiers thinks that Lady Byron may occasionally write to Augusta on indifferent subjects—it will be very kind of Lady Byron and very useful to Augusta, who "must acknowledge to herself that it is so," while to Lady Byron it will "afford the gratification that the consciousness of performing an act of charity must give."

June 22nd.—Mrs. Leigh to Lady Byron: In answer to a letter that has unfortunately been lost. "*One* word of kindness from *you* is I assure you of more value than many others—I rejoice to hear so good an acct. of dear little A.—has she more than the 2 teeth of which I heard from Lady Noel? . . . even considering what you must think of me I owe you gratitude—putting the present out of the question—yr past kindness can never be forgotten—perhaps—and I earnestly hope it—that as I have often told you you once thought *too well* of me, you may one day discover you now think too ill. . . ."

June 28th.—Lady Byron to Mrs. Villiers: "Except at one

period I have always found her much more collected and prepared to repel suspicion than he [Byron] was—and I have always observed the remarkable difference, that his feelings—distinct from practice—were much more sensitive and correct on all moral questions than hers." She sends Mrs. Villiers a copy of Augusta's letter of the 22nd, asking for its return, as she has no other. Augusta, it is greatly to be feared, is still blind to the full enormity of her situation, and "what is to rouse a feeling which appears completely done away, of the nature and magnitude of the offence (to which, even as an imputation, she is strangely insensible) I know not. . . ."

June 30th.—Lady Byron to Mrs. Leigh: This letter repeats the implications of June 3rd, but still goes no nearer to an exact formulation of charges than a reference to "the *material* point." Lady Byron says: "[I have been willing] to hope and trust for the future even when I could not but have the strongest doubts of the past. Yet I rejected suspicion and threw myself on your generosity." Augusta has expressed a desire to see her. Lady Byron would, if she had only herself to consider, go to her this moment, but she must not [the logical process is not evident] out of consideration for her child. But it will be indeed a comfort to her if in time circumstances, and above all Augusta's own conduct, enable them to meet again as friends and sisters.

July 3rd.—Mrs. Leigh to Lady Byron: Another of her perplexing letters of florid self-abasement that is nevertheless again expressly conditioned by an unyielding resolution not to admit anything. Nothing can be kinder than Lady Byron's treatment of her: she, Augusta, is all sense of obligation, she will do anything in the world to regain the favour that she has lost—but "I only wish *every past and present* thought could be open to you—you would then think *less* ill of me than you do—I declare—after the strictest examination of my own heart there is *not one act or thought towards yourself* I would not wish you acquainted with—you say, my dear A, *I have been the cause of your sufferings*—if I have it has been *innocently*. . . . Dearest A.—*I have not wronged you.*" Any one who chooses to see in this the letter of one woman to another with whose husband she has admittedly

lived in incest a few months before the marriage, and who is now protesting that all should be so happily well between them because the guilty relations were not continued after that event, is of course at liberty to do so.

July 8th.—Lady Byron to Mrs. Villiers: "Her eyes seem to be opened . . . she . . . admits respecting what preceded my marriage as much as she could do on paper . . ." [Why it should be difficult to admit more than nothing on paper is not clear] . . . "I am convinced it has been more of self-delusion than duplicity . . . should her pride of self-delusion at any future moment excite your displeasure, I now ask you to forgive her *for my sake.*"

July 9th.—Mrs. Villiers to Lady Byron: No words can tell dear Lady Byron the comfort and relief that her last letter has afforded Mrs. Villiers. Now she is confident that Augusta's mind was "purity and innocence itself," that her eyes have been opened, and that her former feelings and principles will return with double force. [It is to be observed again that Augusta was four years older than Byron, and a married woman with three children at the time of the alleged offence. Can even Mrs. Villiers, from her warm bath of emotion, really mean what she seems to when she speaks about "purity and innocence itself"?]

July 11th.—Lady Byron to Mrs. Villiers: Augusta is going to see Hobhouse. This is unfortunate. Hobhouse has "a morbid delight in the worst parts of human nature, and a bitter spirit of infidelity" that make him a very dangerous confidant for Augusta at this time. A letter must be delivered to Augusta to fortify her against delusion—as to her own precarious state of soul—before she sees him, and it shall be sent to Mrs. Villiers for this purpose.

July 11th.—Lady Byron to Mrs. Leigh: The letter just mentioned, a long one, and perhaps the most amazing document in the series. Again the offence is not directly named, but it is clear now that in veiled terms Lady Byron is saying: "You offended before my marriage, you have convinced me that you have not done so since, and we will now bury the past—but you must be constantly vigilant for the future as you value our peace

and your own salvation." But there are two sentences in the letter, apparently dropped in casually, but of the utmost importance. The first is, "As you do not, and never have attempted to deceive me respecting previous facts, *of which my conviction is unalterable*, I rely the more, etc. . . ." The italics here are mine. If Augusta admits the charge, what possible point can there be in Lady Byron's assurance that her conviction about it is unalterable? The second sentence is, "When I speak of the necessity of confidence, do not suppose I wish to exact any confession—let the past be *understood* now. . . ." Even setting aside the damaging fact that Lady Byron and Mrs. Villiers have been writing to each other on the clear assumption of admissions having been made, only one explanation seems possible of these two interjections. Lady Byron knows that Augusta has in effect confessed nothing, and she does not believe that she can be made to do so; so she says, "No, pray don't confess; let me spare you the pain of that; we will just amiably take it for granted—I hereby record that I am doing that." This may appear to be a severe interpretation, but I do not know how it can be escaped. The letter comes to an entirely fitting close thus: "Write to me and tell me if you can that I am as dear to you as I shall ever be—and trust me as being most truly Your affec^e^ A.I.B."

July 15th.—Mrs. Leigh to Lady Byron: Augusta's reply, and a letter to which a smoke-screen would be limpid clarity. ". . . It is still like a *horrid dream* to me, my dearest A—— that *I* caused y^r^ sufferings whose whole anxiety was at least to mitigate them—I felt it as my only consolation to do *all* I could, and indeed to the best of my judgment I *did* it. Many a time I should have felt it one to have confided unreservedly in you—but concealment appeared a duty under such circumstances—and you know I am of a sanguine disposition and to the very last had hopes of better for you—and for him." What all this may mean I do not pretend to know, but I am sure that it cannot with any semblance of reason be put forward as a confession. The rest of the letter is as incoherent in form and as cryptic in meaning. Reading it as candidly as possible, one is all the time tempted to a surmise, which is shadowily near us always as we follow this strange

history, as to the existence of some passage in it the clue to which has been lost.

July 17th.—Lady Byron to Mrs. Leigh: The reply to the last letter, and already considered on p. 52. In this letter, also, is an expression that will claim attention later.

July 17th.—On the same day Lady Byron faithfully reports to Mrs. Villiers that she has Augusta's answer—it is *all* that it ought to be or that she could desire.

July 18th.—Mrs. Villiers to Lady Byron: Mrs. Villiers has seen Augusta, who has had to come to London on court business, being some sort of a Lady in Waiting, and bidden to the Regent's fête. And Mrs. Villiers is seriously put out. "She wrote to me . . . to prepare her dress for her, and therefore when we first met (an interview wh. I own *I* dreaded beyond measure) our whole conversation turned on *Gauzes and Sattins*—but I was foolishly dissatisfied—I thought her looking quite stout and well . . . and perfectly cool and easy . . . this rather provoked. . . ." Very provoking indeed; can it be that the prey is going to escape the net of these jesuitical fowlers after all? And has there ever been another Mrs. Villiers outside the schemes of Molière or Gilbert and Sullivan? But Augusta has been to dine with them, the Villierses, and has exclaimed, when a predicted destruction of the world has held the table, "I don't know what *you* may all be, but I'm sure I'm not prepared for the next world, so I hope this will last." So that hope rides well yet—"This looks well for her mind—if this feeling is kept up I hope everything from it *with time*—but do not think me brutal or even unkind if I tell you the work is not yet done—I accidentally found yesterday by her question about foreign postage of letters that she was going to write to Ld. B. to-day. . . ." Mrs. Villiers is becoming tiresome, even to the muse of history; she is becoming a menace to the peace when she proceeds, "From my manner to her individually I am positive she cannot guess that I am better informed than when we last met. . . ." And then, in the office of common spy or informer, she goes on: "Another day she told me she had seen Messers Hobhouse and Davies together and that they were going to Geneva directly—upon which I merely said, 'Is Lord B. still

there?'—she said 'Yes—or near there,' and then told me something of a boat in which he was going round the Lake and that Hobhouse said his crew would be drowned by his management, but that *he* wd. be safe by swimming." But the heights of infamy are not yet scaled, and Mrs. Villiers achieves them in the last paragraphs of her letter. Wilmot has been talking to Augusta, or means to talk to her, and it will be "of you [Lady Byron]—your merits, etc.—and to say that he knew there were people who considered you as cold-hearted, unforgiving, etc., and that he advised her (Augusta) to put a stop to that sort of language whenever she heard it in any friends of hers, or it would be the worse for her—I see no objection to this—but he promises to do it in a kind way."

The correspondence is carried on in the same strain almost day by day until the end of August. Incredible things continue to be said in it—e.g., Lady Byron (July 28th) writes to Mrs. Villiers that she shall "animadvert very severely" upon Augusta's extenuating words about Byron, adding that "in another melancholy instance of crime, I have very lately heard the excuse that there was 'no error *in the heart*'—upon such principles what may not be justified?" Two days later she begins a letter to Augusta herself: "It is in hearts like yours and mine, dearest A——, where kind feelings have so much power, that their excess, even in the shape of *sacrifice*, is to be guarded against . . ."; and, looking back across those two days, we find the letter of July 28th to Mrs. Villiers concluding with these words: "I did not wish to leave the impression of any *duplicity* on your mind for another hour," with the word "duplicity" fatally underlined by Lady Byron herself.

It must be added that the correspondence of these days contains other passages to be noted with our later investigation of the expression in the letter of July 17th from Lady Byron to Mrs. Leigh. It may here be remarked, in passing, that at the time when these letters were written Lady Byron was twenty-four years of age.

August 31*st.*—This is, or is near, a crucial date in the story. For a short period there are no letters, but on this day Lady

Byron went to London, and stayed there in lodgings for a fortnight. On a date not specified, but within a few days of her arrival, she saw Mrs. Leigh. This meeting is of the greatest importance, because it is made to provide a vital part of the evidence upon which the argument of *Astarte* rests. At the interview that then took place, we are told, "Augusta made full confession of the previous connection." [1] Lady Lovelace, in her note to the second edition of *Astarte*, speaks at this date of the interview "in which Mrs. Leigh made the full confession described in . . . [reference to the passage just quoted]." Sir John Fox takes the statement over without comment thus, "Lady Byron came to London on August 31, and Mrs. Leigh made a verbal confession to her that the offence had been committed. . . ." It is a remarkable thing that this very dramatic turn in the evidence should be wholly unsupported by any reference or authority whatever; but that is the case. The alleged confession is not "described" in *Astarte;* it is merely recorded in the bare terms mentioned above. We are not told how convincing the document among Lady Byron's papers in which the record appears may be; we are not even told that there is such a document. Lord Lovelace states that the confession was made, and leaves it at that. We are told that Lady Byron said that Augusta told her the charge was a just one. This, by all the rules, will not do.

The correspondence is resumed on or about September 12th, and its character is unchanged. Augusta continues to protest gratitude and anxious devotion, Lady Byron and Mrs. Villiers continue to felicitate each other on Augusta's submission and spiritual purging. "I assure you I only feel . . . pleasure and comfort in seeing you," says Augusta to Lady Byron, and "your letter has given me the greatest comfort and I do not dread *your* misunderstanding my *un*expressed feelings toward you—for all your kindness and consideration." Mrs. Villiers, who has been told by Lady Byron whatever it may be that there is to tell, can with truth inform Augusta "that the reason for my being told was *kindness* to her to prevent my injuring her by over zeal," and she will be entirely guided by Lady Byron as to her (Mrs.

[1] *Astarte,* p. 162.

Villiers's) management of her (Augusta). Lady Byron tells Mrs. Villiers that Mr. Wilmot should not be let into the secret, because "his defect certainly is vanity," and he might be offended by the fact of the confidence not having been imparted to him direct. Mrs. Villiers reassures her friend that she had no intention of telling Mr. W., and she for her part has "long been convinced that Vanity was his weak point." And Mrs. Villiers has, finally, "great reason, my dear L^{y} B., to rejoice in your efforts to save this unfortunate being, for I really do believe and hope that they will be rewarded by success." The one thing that is still signally lacking in the correspondence is any confirmation on the part of Augusta of the alleged confession, and, indeed, any reference to it.

The last letter in this series is dated September 17th, 1816. We have no others until the middle of 1819, when there is an active epistolary argument between Lady Byron and Augusta as to what the latter ought to do in the event of Byron's return to England, which seems to be imminent. There are points in this earlier stage of the correspondence to be considered a little later in another connection, but none that need detain us for the moment in coming to certain conclusions.

These conclusions are as follows. *Astarte* was expressly written for the purpose of vindicating Lady Byron's character. Enough has been said to show that, whatever the facts about Byron may be, never was purpose born under an unluckier star. Lady Byron, as she appears in *Astarte*, was an unfortunate woman, a harassed and disappointed woman, and there is considerable reason for suspecting that she was a greatly wronged woman. Also she had courage and staying power. But she surrendered her conscience to a ruthless spiritual vanity. There is a code of honour even among archangels and outcasts, and Lady Byron, confidently believing herself to be of those exalted, did not observe it. As for Mrs. Villiers, her sorry part in the business has been made sufficiently clear; it is only fair to suppose that she was bewitched into doing herself less than justice. We are informed in *Astarte* that Augusta confessed also to her at the time of the admissions to Lady Byron, though this statement is

supported by even less authority than the other, if less be possible. The later letters speak allusively of some such occurrence, but all that Augusta herself has to say about it is, when Lady Byron suggests that after their own interview she should see Mrs. Villiers, that she begs to be excused.

6

We come now to a further conclusion from the letters that have just been examined. There was unquestionably some serious grievance in Lady Byron's mind against Augusta, and in general terms Augusta admits that it is justified. It is, moreover, clearly related to some circumstance that involves Byron. We may go beyond this, and say that there is every indication, short of explicit definition, that Lady Byron believed incest to have taken place; there are two or three passages in the letters that we have reserved for investigation in this precise context. But, before considering the case finally as to the strength of this specific charge, there is one general observation to be made, and two remarkable expressions from Augusta's letters to be noted. The observation is that, dismissing assumptions and hearsay, there is absolutely no evidence that Augusta at any time in her life confessed that she had had incestuous relations with Byron. The expressions are:

(*a*) On September 17th, 1816, a few days after her interview with Lady Byron, Augusta writes to her: "Towards *another* person [Byron] she [Mrs. Villiers] is *very* violent . . . but I think it better not to say a word, tho' in fact *I* am the one *much* the most to blame." Early in 1814 Byron writes to Lady Melbourne, "It was not her fault, but my folly," and says he is "the cause of all." Taking this "her" to refer to Augusta, as inferentially we must, each of the offenders is accepting the whole responsibility. This, if it were a chivalrous exchange between parties in misfortune, would be intelligible enough. But it cannot be taken as this. When Augusta wrote her letter she had, as will be seen, already begun to play fast and loose with any feelings of loyalty to Byron that would presumably have been

the outcome of a guilty secret between them. Whether she had or had not confessed to this fault, she certainly had not told Byron that she had; if, then, the fault was a reality, she was in the position, obviously, of having to keep some sort of faith with Byron. Instead of this, much to her discredit, she appears to have carried on a correspondence with him that allowed him no inkling of the fact that she was daily discussing him in the most invidious terms with Lady Byron behind his back. So that, even if incest had taken place, whether the alleged confession was a fact or not, Augusta was by September 17th no longer under any inducement of loyalty to Byron to defend him to Lady Byron, since he is already unequivocally dismissed from favour in their counsels. On the other hand, she is under every inducement to stress her own feelings as little as possible. The position is this: for some reason, Augusta, as the letters show beyond question, is desperately anxious to stand well with Lady Byron. This reason may have been fear, or natural affection, or a wish to gratify her sister-in-law's taste for soul-saving, or to gain her interest, financial possibly, or in some other direction. Whatever it is, we find Augusta because of it submitting to all sorts of indignity; she confesses nothing, it is true, but she pitifully fails to tell Lady Byron to mind her own business. And now, we are to believe, when after great persistence she had convinced Lady Byron that "her errors of judgment, however to be regretted, were perfectly innocent," and when she is at last assured of the security she so anxiously desires, she, for no reason, says in effect, "Now, my dear, that we are friends, and you are so good to me, and I am so safe with you, let me tell you that in this lamentable business between Byron and myself I was by far the most to blame." That there is in all this, on the assumption of incest, something extremely difficult to explain, must be obvious. Again, the suggestion forces itself upon us that this circumstance, so freely discussed in the correspondence by all parties to it, so plausibly taken to be incest, though always just failing by the turn of a word to declare itself explicitly to be so, may, after all, be a yet more obscure secret than is commonly allowed. Such an explanation, if some day it should be found, might relieve Lady

Byron of great odium, but it might also make Augusta an intelligible being, which on the present acceptance of facts she grotesquely is not.[1]

(*b*) The second expression referred to occurs in a letter of June 28th, 1819. Augusta has sent to Lady Byron a letter from Byron, written when he was at Venice in May, couched in very affectionate and, it is claimed, compromising terms. Of this letter two things may be observed here: first, that while it could bear the interpretation usually assigned to it (it has become, perhaps, the classic paper of the story), it is still not wholly impossible that it should bear another; and secondly, that it begins "My dearest Love," and that all names in it have been erased, including the signature. Augusta has asked how it should be dealt with, and Lady Byron has given her views. Augusta, on the date mentioned, weighs these up, and is governed in her conclusions by the reflection that "if really and truly he feels . . . that passion he professes, I have constantly imagined he might suppose from his experience of the *weakness* of disposition, of the unfortunate Object, that driven from every other hope or earthly prospect she might fly to *him!*" Is not this an extremely odd and enigmatic way for a woman, addressing one who is completely in her confidence, to speak about herself?

1 With the Byron papers kept by Lord Lindsay are a great many newspaper cuttings relating to the Beecher Stowe controversy. Among them is a letter from *The Evening Standard* of September 10th, 1869, written by a Colonel Godfrey Massy of Cleveland, Ohio, "late of the Greek Volunteers." It is worthless as evidence, but it contains a story that can hardly have been invented by the writer, and it is difficult to see why Byron should have invented it himself. Its interest lies in the suggestion of some such hidden circumstances as we have supposed may exist. Colonel Massy, opening in style by observing that he had fought by Byron's side in the Greek War of Independence, says that, in a conversation with Byron shortly before the poet's death, the separation was discussed. He adds that Byron then said, "I had a mistress [whom Massy believes to have been Augusta's maid] . . . and when once or twice she [Lady Byron] nearly discovered it, I told her the woman she had seen me with was Augusta Leigh, and poor Augusta had to lie on one occasion to get me out of the scrape." At last Lady Byron discovered the truth, and "accused Augusta of being a party to the intrigue." Massy proceeds: "I could only gather that she [Lady Byron] had accused Mrs. Leigh of acting as a procuress in an amour which distressed her domestic peace."

7

We now pass from reviewing the effect that the charge had upon some of the people chiefly concerned, to a closer investigation of the charge itself. The significant evidence against Byron and Augusta may be set out in five clauses.

(*a*) Lady Byron, in her letter to Augusta dated July 17th, 1816, says: "It seems to me that you dwell too much on the pain you involuntarily occasioned me, and not enough on the irreparable injury you did *him* by the voluntary sacrifices (for to principles and feelings like yours they must have been *entirely* sacrifices) which you once made to his immediate indulgences."

(*b*) On the birth of Augusta's child in April 1814 (Medora, supposed by opinion unfavourable to Byron to be his own), Byron writes to Lady Melbourne: "Oh! but it is 'worth while,' I can't tell you why, and it is *not* an '*Ape*,' and if it is that must be my fault; however, I will positively reform. . . . But positively she and I will grow good and all that, and so we are *now* and shall be these three weeks and more too."

(c) On April 30th, 1814, Byron writes to Lady Melbourne: "As for my A. [as distinguished from her A., Miss Milbanke] my feelings towards her are a mixture of good and diabolical. I hardly know one passion which has not some share in them."

(*d*) Byron to Lady Melbourne, October 7th, 1814: "her [Augusta's, it seems clear, though her name is not given] only error has been my fault entirely, and for this I can plead no excuse, except passion, which is none."

(*e*) Passages in Byron's letter to Augusta, above mentioned, dated May 17th, 1819, for example: "My own, we may have been very wrong—but I repent of nothing except that cursed marriage—and your refusing to continue to love me as you have loved me—I can neither forget nor *quite forgive* you for that precious piece of reformation. . . . It is heart-breaking to think of our long separation—and I am sure more than punishment enough for all our sins—Dante is more humane in his 'Hell,' for he places his unfortunate lovers (Francesca of Rimini and Paolo, whose case fell a good deal short of *ours*—though

sufficiently naughty) in company—and though they suffer—it is at least together. . . . They say absence destroys weak passions—and confirms strong ones. Alas! mine for you is the union of all passions and all affections—Has strengthened itself but will destroy me—I do not speak of *physical* destruction—for I have endured and can endure much—but of the annihilation of all thoughts, feelings or hopes—which have not more or less a reference to you and to *our recollections*. Ever dearest [signature erased]."

This evidence, taken without relating it to any other, would probably be accepted by most people as conclusive. Even when all objections to it have been made and every conflicting argument from other evidence has been set against it, it remains at best impossible wholly to dismiss it from our minds. But it must be noted:

(1) That even here, in its most damaging form, the evidence nowhere commits itself to an explicit formulation of the charge. It may be extremely likely that the accepted surmise as to what this was is right, but it is nowhere made absolutely certain that it could not conceivably be wrong.

(2) The apparently inculpating expressions to Lady Melbourne have to be put beside others no less equivocal—as, for instance (April 30th, 1814): "*You*, or rather *I*, have done *my A.* much injustice. The expression which you recollect as objectionable meant only 'loving' in the *senseless* sense of that wide word. . . ."

(3) The erasure of all names in the letter of May 17th, 1819, may mean nothing, but it would be satisfactory to have it explained. That the letter was written by Byron may be taken as confirmed by all the circumstances. That it was written to Augusta is also highly probable. But there are two points that we should like to have cleared up. Sir John Fox tells us that the letter is printed from a copy, the original being inaccessible. Who, then, made this copy? Augusta speaks of enclosing the letter to Lady Byron, and Lady Byron of returning it, in terms that make it clear that they are speaking of the letter itself, and not of a copy. Were the erasures made in the

original, or in the copy only, and in either case by whom? And why? And, also, why is the printed version of the letter from Augusta in which she says that she has "endeavoured in vain, in *thought and deed* to reply," an expression that Sir John Fox takes as the proof that Augusta was unquestionably the recipient of Byron's letter, given without any signature at all? These points may in effect be pointless, but, on the other hand, they may prove not to be quite irrelevant if some day altogether new evidence should appear.

In general, it should be added that there is a good deal of supplementary evidence against Byron to be found, especially in his letters to Lady Melbourne, but that it is supplementary only, and most of it cryptic because of the unfortunate fact that we have but an insignificant salvage of Lady Melbourne's own letters to which Byron's refer, nearly always in terms that are inconclusive in their absence. And there are further considerations on the same problem that will be embodied in the main account of Byron's life.

It will, I think, be admitted that, however decided our impressions may be as to what is the truth of the matter, the evidence as we have it has a curious way of drifting off into uncertainties at critical moments. A studied indirectness of accusation, crucial references to letters that we do not possess, inconsistencies of attitude, often within an hour, letters with blank spaces and without signatures, vital documents that might easily be verified and are not, capital assumptions airily reaffirmed in spite of disclaimers, frequent ambiguities in most pertinent phrases—these beset the history as it has come down to us, and they make final judgment a task of more than common responsibility. One instance of the prevalent confusion may be given. Mrs. Stowe's book is a discreditable one, but it contains statements that, although they may be insecurely presented, have every appearance of not being founded on mere invention. One of the most important of these is that she was assured by Lady Byron that before the separation Byron had made to her a full confession of his offence with Augusta, and credibility of Mrs. Stowe's assertion is enhanced by the elaboration that Lady Byron

said that he threatened her with the necessity of having to submit to its continuance.[1] It is unlikely that Mrs. Stowe convinced herself that she had heard this from Lady Byron without having heard at least something very like it. But Lord Lovelace states or implies repeatedly in *Astarte* that Byron, for long after the separation, was uncertain as to what, if anything, Lady Byron knew. We have here a characteristic example of the difficulties that complicate our enquiry, if they make it none the less engaging.

The whole question is, moreover, very greatly obscured by the riddle of Augusta. Whether Byron's half-sister was his lover or not, she was an extremely enigmatical woman, and the caprices of her character as we know it seem to have been insufficiently considered. So marked are these that they are, indeed, hardly to be accounted for even at the extreme limits of human eccentricity. However bad or mad she may have been, it is not rational to suppose that she can really have behaved as badly or as madly as she seems to have done on occasion if we accept circumstances at their obvious value. So much is this the case that we cannot but wonder, at times, whether the circumstances themselves are not out of our reckoning. An attempt will be made hereafter to give this hitherto neglected feature of the story its proper significance.

The late Mr. Clutton-Brock was fond of telling the story of a trial that, as a young barrister, he had witnessed in a northern assize court. A youth who had been at a local industrial school and had subsequently started upon a successful career in the world, returned after a few years to see his old masters and friends. Having spoken in the playground in encouraging terms to some of the small boys, he invited one of them to go for a walk with him. The child returned some hours later in a state of collapse and said that his companion had taken him to a hut in a wood, tied him up to a post, wickedly ill-treated him and left him to make his own escape, which he had done, terrified and exhausted. Some days later the young man was arrested, and, on being charged, said, "Yes, and I ought —— well to be

[1] Mrs. Stowe, pp. 159-60.

hanged for it." While he was awaiting trial, after being committed from the police court, a solicitor was sent to advise him. The prisoner thereupon professed complete ignorance of the whole story. On being told that this was idle in view of the dozen or so witnesses to be brought against him and his own exclamation on arrest, he said that on the date of his alleged offence he had been in an inaccessible part of Yorkshire, doing casual farm labour, and that he had been so occupied at different farms for several days before the crime and for several days after it. He gave the names of the farmers, with precise details of his movements from day to day. These farmers were sent for. They were of unquestioned character, there was no possibility of collusion between them, and they had no interest whatever in shielding the accused. To a man they identified him and confirmed his story in every particular. At the trial the two sides produced their witnesses, with an array of evidence that was direct and complete, and the two versions of a plain tale flatly and unconditionally contradicted each other. The youth was acquitted. Clutton-Brock, much impressed by what seemed to be a perfect instance of the impossible having happened, asked the detective in charge of the case whether there were any undivulged circumstances to account for it. The authorities knew of none. That the youth was guilty was no less clear than that he was innocent, and Clutton-Brock always contended that the problem was beyond rational explanation.

The Byron case has in it an element of this same baffling opposition of simple statements. It is not a question of one piece of evidence being demonstrably false in the light of another, but of radically conflicting testimonies that even in the light of each other retain every appearance of good faith and probability. By the rule of an English court, it is very doubtful whether the most skilful pleading could secure a conviction against Byron in the face of his own evidence and the damaging exposure of inconsistency to which that of the prosecution, with all its strength, would be subjected. There would, we think, be a rather better than even chance in his favour, while, in Scotland, he would certainly at least get a verdict of not proven. To make a per-

sonal confession, I may say that, having examined every word of the available evidence as impartially as I could, I would not, on a jury, give a verdict against him. But I cannot by any means add that, our information being what it at present is, I could feel that a strong presumptive suspicion against him had been removed. My own view is that we may find that the conclusive last word of the story has yet to be revealed, but that in the meantime we must accept his life in all its complexity of suffering, error, power, and achievement, with what allowance we may individually think fit for this dark but unresolved possibility. Whatever the measure of that allowance may be, the pungency and the appeal of his character seem to me to remain unaffected.

It may be asked, in view of the admission just made, what has been the purpose of discussing the evidence favourable to Byron, considered at intervals in this chapter. If the main charge against him be even conditionally allowed, it may be held by some people that to debate circumstances that do not clear him, even though they may be extenuating, is a waste of time. No view could be more alien to the spirit of the present study. If the most controversial aspect of Byron's life is to be treated as the mere occasion for the exercise of legal wits, then to convict or exonerate him in the fact is the extent of our concern. But forensic satisfaction of this kind can make little appeal to observers who are engaged with character and motives that find no definition in the law-courts. The fact at the centre of the Byron controversy has, unquestionably, an absolute moral significance, but what that significance precisely is we find to be of entirely secondary importance in our own enquiry. The moralists may fight that battle out elsewhere if they will. The meaning of the charge, proved or disproved, is chiefly for us that it was, in the true dramatic way, an event that provoked into striking expression the character not only of our protagonist, but that of at least two other people, whose lives were very closely cast with his. We learn nearly all we know of any interest concerning Lady Byron and Augusta from their conduct under its influence. And of Byron, though it is at most but a vital incident

in his career, we learn more from his behaviour in relation to it than from any conclusion we may come to about the charge itself. Without this analysis, many simple passages in the following narrative would lose their right atmosphere and perspective. The margin of doubt in either direction as to what really happened in this domestic vortex will, it is probable, always be variously decided; but we gather from the known circumstances of the case a strongly reinforced opinion of the characters involved. Hereafter the "mystery" will be given directly little or no attention; but it was necessary once and for all to fix its due place in the background of our story.

Chapter II

YOUTH

(1788-1809)

"It is impossible to reflect on the boyhood of Byron without regret. There is not one point in it all which could, otherwise than with pain, have affected a young mind of sensibility."

—GALT.

1

GEORGE GORDON, afterwards the sixth Lord Byron, was born on January 22nd, 1788. Moore tells us that the event took place in Holles Street, London, a statement that the elder Dallas contradicted, saying that from his personal knowledge it was at Dover. Lord Ernle, however, shows that Dallas was mistaken, by telling us circumstantially that it was in a house then numbered 16 Holles Street, now no longer existing, and in the back drawing-room of the first floor. But it was ingenious of Dallas to find the seeds of dispute at so early a date in the poet's life.[1]

About 1750, an Admiral Byron, by being shipwrecked, "awakened in no small degree, the attention and sympathy of the public." This was Foul-weather Jack, and the poet's grandfather. His brother, William, the fifth Lord Byron, killed a neighbour in a scuffle, and was tried for murder before the House of Lords. He was convicted of manslaughter, being discharged on pleading his privilege; but thereafter became, as the recluse of Newstead Abbey, a figure of sensational gossip. On one occasion, his coachman disobeying him, he is said to have shot that worthy,

[1] It is worth noting that the Countess Guiccioli, who can hardly have gone to Dallas for her information, writing more than forty years after Byron's death, says, "When obliged to return to England to be confined, she [Mrs. Byron] was so far advanced in pregnancy that she could not reach London in time, but gave birth to Lord Byron in Dover."

thrown the body into the carriage to Lady Byron, mounted the box and driven off himself. At another time, he was reported to have tried to drown his wife in the local pond. His less legendary occupations do not seem to have been recorded.

The admiral's son, John, was an ostentatiously bad man. His profligacy early exhausted even the good nature of Foul-weather Jack, who disowned him. He eloped with Lady Carmarthen, married her on her divorce, ruined her fortunes, and behaved abominably to her. Five years after the marriage Lady Conyers (as she was in her own right) died, "literally of a broken heart," says Galt, and left Captain Byron with one infant daughter, Augusta, who afterwards became Mrs. Leigh. It is fair to add that Byron himself, late in his life, made a characteristically gallant defence of his father.

"Mad Jack Byron," as he was euphemistically called, was desperately in need of money, and Miss Catherine Gordon of Gight had "a respectable fortune, for a Scottish heiress." This lady was, it appears, readily susceptible to his addresses, and is said to have been so moved by Mrs. Siddons at an Edinburgh theatre, during the early days of her courtship, that she was carried out in a fit screaming, "Oh, my Byron, my Byron." She married her Byron in 1785, the year after Lady Conyers's death, and he proceeded to deal as faithfully by her money as he had done by his first wife's. In 1787 he accounted for the last of it, with the exception of a remnant secured by trustees in Mrs. Byron's favour, yielding a hundred and fifty pounds a year. The Byron Gordons, mad Jack having taken his wife's name for family reasons, spent a year or two in France before returning to England just before the birth of their only child at Holles Street. Mrs. Byron then went to Aberdeen, and here the poet spent his first years. His father, having exhausted the financial resources of domesticity, tired of it and set up a separate establishment. He died when his son was three years of age, and Mrs. Byron's grief on the occasion was "loud and vehement," which was more than he deserved.

There is the usual crop of anecdotal information about the poet's early childhood.[1] At the age of five he was sent to a pri-

vate school in Aberdeen, remaining there a year, when he moved on to the Grammar School of the same city, after a course of private instruction. Moore gives us, as an example of his "prowess in sports," the information that "he was a good hand at marbles, being able to drive one farther than most boys." But his athletic ambitions were less limited than this might suggest, and he was, in fact, good at games, and became later a tolerable all-round performer at such exercises, playing for Harrow against Eton at cricket—for what that amounted to in 1805—and growing into something of a crack swimmer. At school, also, while he could be affectionate enough, he was known for a quick pugnacity of temper, and both his athletic skill and his cholers were affected by a circumstance that was a lifelong distress to him. The fishwives of Aberdeen, when provoked by his pranks, as they often were, would retaliate by dubbing him "Mrs. Byron's crockit deevil," alluding to a malformed foot with which he had been born. Accounts differ greatly as to how marked this defect was, some observers saying that it resulted in a pronounced limp, others that it was so slight as to leave them in doubt as to which was the affected limb. It does not matter; but that Byron was always acutely sensitive to what he took to be a personal disgrace there is no doubt. It was just the sort of thing to accentuate dark humours in a character sufficiently testy by nature, and it undoubtedly had a deeper influence upon him than it is possible exactly to demonstrate. It was, also, a lamentable resource in his quarrels with his mother, which became frequent and unseemly. When they were out of temper with each other she was not above girding at his infirmity, nor he above reproaching her with having been the cause of it by some false modesty at his birth. It may be noted that he kept a uniformly humble position in class, with an occasional spurt.

When he was eight years old he spent some time in the highland country on Deeside beyond Aberdeen, convalescing after an attack of scarlet fever. People romantically inclined in their conceptions of the spirit of poetry have been ready to attach deep formative significance to these days spent in the neighbour-

hood of "The steep frowning glories of dark Loch na Garr." But Moore has a passage on this subject so admirable in its intuition and common sense that it deserves to be quoted as a warning to all such idle speculation:

It may be questioned whether this faculty [the poetic talent] was ever so produced. That the charm of scenery, which derives its chief power from fancy and association, should be much felt at an age when fancy is yet hardly awake, and associations but few, can with difficulty . . . be conceived. The light which the poet sees around the forms of nature is not so much in the objects themselves as in the eye that contemplates them; and Imagination must first be able to lend a glory to such scenes, before she can derive inspiration *from* them. As materials, indeed, for the poetic faculty, when developed, to work upon, these impressions . . . retained from childhood . . . may form, it is true . . . part of that aliment with which the memory of the poet feeds his imagination. But still . . . it is the force of fancy alone that, acting upon his recollections, impregnates, as it were, all the past with poesy. In this respect, such impressions of natural scenery as Lord Byron received in his childhood must be classed with . . . other remembrances . . . which the poet afterwards converts to his use, but which no more *make* the poet, etc.

One is reminded of the poet who, on being told by a lady that he must visit her Mediterranean villa, as she was sure that he would be inspired by the scenery, civilly replied that he always found inspiration so confusing.

In 1813 Byron wrote in his journal:

I have been thinking a good deal lately of Mary Duff. How very odd that I should have been so utterly, devotedly fond of that girl at an age when I could neither feel passion, nor know the meaning of the word. . . . I have been attached fifty times since that period; yet I recollect all we said to each other, all our caresses, her features, my restlessness, sleeplessness. . . . I wonder if she can have the least remembrance of it or me? . . . I should be quite grieved to see her now; the reality, however beautiful, would destroy, or at least confuse, the features of the lovely Peri which then existed in her, and still lives in my imagination, at the distance of more than sixteen years. I am now twenty-five and odd months. . . .

Thus at the age of nine he had—and it seems to have made an uncommonly lasting impression—his first experience of what was to be so constant and so varied an occupation of his life. It is not until some three years later that he himself dates his "first dash into poetry" under the influence of another romance; but, even so, we have a sufficiently early indication of his bent towards that other pursuit that, it will be found, doubtless to the surprise of some people, took up even more of his time.

In 1794 the young George Gordon unexpectedly became heir to the Byron peerage of Rochdale, and the estates of Newstead in Nottinghamshire, and succeeded to these on the death of the "wicked Lord Byron" in May 1798. A few months later he moved to Newstead with his mother, who, before leaving Aberdeen, sold the contents of their lodging for a sum less than seventy-five pounds. They found Newstead Abbey in a condition almost of ruin, and the estate impoverished by neglect and the systematic sale of timber. The old lord had, moreover, sold the family estate of Rochdale, and for some years the poet was engaged in a lawsuit concerning the recovery of this property. Byron was, in actual substance, a rich man, but these early embarrassments of his fortunes drifted on throughout his life, and although he was in a position to be very generous on occasion, he seems to have been in money difficulties as often as most other poets.

The effect upon Byron of this elevation was very important. Although in 1798 he had actually been next of kin for over three years, when he was born there was no prospect of his succession, and there was nothing in his early circumstances to prepare him for it. His mother, it is said, always cherished the belief that, in spite of improbability, "he was destined to be a lord," but she had neither the means nor the character to be more than prophetic about it. Even when, by the sudden death of a cousin, he became heir to the title and its responsibilities, no one seems to have been able or willing to help him towards a proper assumption of them. The old gentleman at Newstead lived in dirty and discreditable retirement with "Lady Betty," a domestic servant who was so called by the neighbourhood

because of the station to which she was suspected of having been "promoted by her noble master," and, according to the poet, his only other companions were crickets, which he made "so tame that they used to crawl over him, and, when they were too familiar, he whipped them with a whisp of straw: at his death, it is said, they left the house in a body." The morose nobleman was, doubtless, wholly indifferent as to who, if anybody, was to succeed him, and although some representations seem to have been made to him on behalf of his grandnephew, they met with no response. As for Byron himself, he became at once dramatically conscious of a pride of race, and was duly encouraged in this by his mother; but she did nothing to teach him the proper way in which to support it.

When, therefore, he arrived at Newstead as the sixth Lord Byron of Rochdale, at the age of ten, he came as a small boy who had been brought up on extremely straitened means, under very meagre family influences, and with no knowledge of the society in which he was now called upon to take his place. It was to the boy, at the time, no more than an exciting adventure; but in Moore's excellent phrase, "a total and talismanic change had been wrought in all his future relations" with the world. To this unhappily conditioned change may be traced from his childhood one of his least amiable characteristics. Byron, in later years, might sometimes forget that he was a gentleman, but he would never for a moment forget that he was a lord.

In 1801 Byron was sent to Harrow. In the meantime the brief record of his boyhood at Newstead and at a private school in London makes unedifying reading. He amused himself at first by indulging the example that his childish fancy found in the formidable old man whom he had succeeded. He carried small loaded pistols in his pockets, remembering the story of his uncle having killed a man, and promising himself that so would he avenge any insults directed by his schoolfellows against his physical deformity. For a time Mrs. Byron took her son to Nottingham, living in a house still standing at the top of St. James's Street, and also at lodgings in Pelham Street. While in that city the boy was placed under the care of a quack mis-

named Lavender, whose method was to soak the foot in oil, wrench it into shape, and screw it up in a wooden machine. Byron hated his tormentor, but it took Mrs. Byron several months to be convinced that Mr. Lavender's barbarities were doing a great deal more harm than good. She thereupon took her son to London, and placed him under Dr. Matthew Baillie, a brother of the illustrious Joanna, with much more fortunate results.

Mrs. Byron's position was, it must be allowed, difficult enough. She still had but the hundred and fifty a year of her own, and Byron, being a minor, could make no separate provision for her from the estate. It was, no doubt, with these facts in view that, about the time of their removal to London, she was granted an annuity of three hundred pounds from the Civil List. The more she and her son saw of each other the more unsuitable did their companionship become. That Mrs. Byron was lacking in natural maternal affection has never been suggested; but in her normal moods she exercised it with no control, and these moods were subject to frequent and violent disturbances, when she became a common termagant. Byron was easily provoked by these exhibitions to retaliation, and although, much to his credit, he remembered his duty to her punctiliously as long as she lived, he soon became heartily sick of the sight of her. Their direct encounters were marked by an utter absence of discipline on either side. She was a woman, says Galt, "without judgment or self-command, alternately spoiling her child by indulgence, irritating him by her self-willed obstinacy, and, what is still worse, amusing him by her violence, and disgusting him by fits of inebriety. . . . She was a short and corpulent person. She rolled in her gait, and would, in her rage, sometimes endeavour to catch him for the purpose of inflicting punishment, while he would run round the room, mocking her menaces and mimicking her motion." It was on such an occasion that she called her son, with an indecency that he never forgot, "a lame brat." She was, moreover, given to making scenes with the servants, than which nothing can more shame a sensitive child. In London the boy was put to school with Dr. Glennie of Dulwich. He was happy here, and diligent, reading the poets from Chaucer to

Churchill, and engaging the affection of a good master. But even here his mother persisted in her misguided attentions. Dr. Glennie was quick to perceive that very little had been done to fit his young charge for his station in life, and he addressed himself to the case with energy and good sense. Byron was always responsive to friendly and judicious treatment, and all would have gone well but for Mrs. Byron's meddling visitations. Incapable of discipline herself, she was determined that no one else should exercise it. She kept her son away from school for days on end for no reason, indulged him in the formation of bad habits and associations, and generally did her best to tease the good Dr. Glennie's life out of him. Lord Carlisle, who was a distant kinsman of the family, and had been made Byron's guardian in chancery, for a time lent his authority against this interference, and encouraged the pedagogue to keep the boy at school whether his mother liked it or no. Mrs. Byron did not like it, and went down in a rampage to Dulwich, startling the establishment from study to kitchen with a paroxysm of passion. Dr. Glennie appealed again to Lord Carlisle, but that nobleman had had enough of it, and told the doctor that he must manage the woman as well as he could, which was not at all. Dr. Glennie ran a hearty but unequal contest for two years, and on being finally defeated consoled himself by writing:

> Mrs. Byron was a total stranger to English society and English manners; with an exterior far from prepossessing, an understanding where nature had not been more bountiful, a mind almost wholly without cultivation. . . . I trust I do not great prejudice to the memory of my countrywoman, if I say Mrs. Byron was not . . . endowed with powers to retrieve the fortune, and form the character and manners, of a young nobleman, her son.

This is drastic, but it so far confirms our information from other sources, as to make it clear that Byron's early domestic environment was sufficiently discouraging.

Before leaving Dr. Glennie's he had fallen in love again, this time with a cousin, Miss Parker, who was already marked

with the fatal beauty of a decline. This was in 1800. Again he could neither sleep nor eat, and this time he discovered himself as a poet in an "ebullition" that has not been preserved. His mother was now dissatisfied with the results of Dr. Glennie's tuition, having been assiduous in making no results possible, and at length Lord Carlisle, sensible no doubt to his own peace of mind, consented to his ward's removal. Byron accordingly entered Harrow in the summer term of 1801.

2

The head master of a great public school was less susceptible than the principal of a private academy to the menaces of Mrs. Byron, and at Harrow Byron came for the first time into foursquare contact with the world, to make the best he could of himself and it. At first he was miserable, and his pride was a little scared in a place that he decided at once he should hate, a resolution that he kept for some terms. He realised in his first week that he was backward for his age in his studies, and feared the humiliation that would fall on him when this should be exposed in class. But Dr. Drury, then head of Harrow, besides being a scholar, was a man of discernment. It is no slight virtue in a schoolmaster that discovers at sight exceptional temperament and gifts in one among the many small boys who come up to him, and this is what Dr. Drury managed to do for Byron. He observed at once the defects of discipline and knowledge; but he saw also that here was a character that needed coaxing and a mind that might handsomely repay any trouble taken to direct it. He realised the boy's misgivings about his own deficiencies, and sympathised with them. He promised that, until he had had a fair chance to make up for lost time, he should not be placed in class—a promise that was faithfully kept. By his kindness and good sense in this and other matters, Dr. Drury earned Byron's deep and lasting gratitude. In afteryears the poet could write: "Dr. Drury, whom I plagued sufficiently too, was the best, the kindest (and yet strict, too) friend I ever had—and I look on him still as a father." And again,

in one of the notes to the Fourth Canto of *Childe Harold:* "The Rev[d] Dr. Joseph Drury, was the best and worthiest friend I ever possessed. . . . If ever this imperfect record of my feelings towards him should reach his eyes, let it remind him of one who never thinks of him but with gratitude and veneration —of one who would more gladly boast of having been his pupil, if, by more closely following his injunctions, he could reflect any honour upon his instructor."

After a time the boy began, in some measure at least, to justify his master's expectations of him. He scored no particular academic successes; but, Dr. Drury having occasion to interview Lord Carlisle, he was able to announce to him that his ward had "talents that would add lustre to his rank." The guardian seems to have been sceptical, and, says Drury, not so gratified as could have been wished. Lord Carlisle, however, though born in 1748, outlived Byron by a year, and, while his relations with his young cousin were never very fortunate, he was a man of taste and some literary attainments himself, and he must have come to acknowledge the Doctor's foresight.

It took Byron three or four terms to settle down, and then for a time he made a reasonably good job of his schooling. "I was a most unpopular boy," he tells us, "but *led* latterly, and have retained several of my school friendships." These friendships, mostly with now forgotten names, were, as might be supposed, "passions"—the word is his own—with him at the time, but none seems to have survived into later life.[1] He showed his spirit on occasion, as when a schoolfellow Peel—the great Sir Robert—was being bullied by a larger boy, and Byron, not being strong enough to resist the tyranny, offered to share the chastisement. He liked also to find smaller and weaker boys towards whom he could stand in the office of protector. He was apt to choose these pensioners on his good-will from people beneath himself in rank, thus indulging a not uncommon form of snobbery. In the choice of his friends on equal terms, however, Moore observes his leanings towards the peerage, and tells a hardly credible story of his asking a monitor not to punish

[1] An exception, perhaps, should be made in the case of Lord Clare.

an offender, and to the question, "Why not?" replying, "Why, I don't know—except that he is a brother peer." Children are apt to be queer creatures, but we should like to think that this one was not so very queer as that. Much pleasanter is Byron's own account of a friendship that seems to have been of a kind that he was in the habit of forming—"George Sinclair . . . used at times to beg me to let him do my exercise—a request always most readily accorded upon a pinch, or when I wanted to do something else, which was usually once an hour. On the other hand, he was pacific and I savage: so I fought for him, or thrashed others for him, or thrashed himself to make him thrash others when it was necessary, as a point of honour and stature . . . or we talked politics . . . and were very good friends."

At the beginning of Easter term, 1803, Byron came into conflict with the school authorities. His first housemaster was Henry Drury, the Doctor's son, but he now refused to return to school unless he were removed from his house. The younger Drury had complained of Byron's inattention to business, and had asked to be relieved of his charge. Dr. Drury had declined to accede to this request, until it was supported by Byron himself, which for some reason it now cordially was. On his returning early in 1803, however, to another house, the feud seems to have been renewed. On May 1st Byron, now aged fifteen, writes to his mother:

I am sorry to say Mr. Henry Drury has behaved himself to me in a manner I neither *can* nor *will* bear. He has now seized an opportunity of showing his resentment towards me. To-day in church I was talking to a Boy who was sitting next me; *that* perhaps was not right, but hear what followed. After church he spoke not a word to me, but he took this Boy to his pupilroom, where he abused me in a most violent manner, called me *blackguard*, said he *would* and *could* have me expelled from the School, and bade me thank his *Charity* that prevented him. . . . Is this fit usage for anybody? . . . If he had had it in his power to have me expelled, he would long ago have *done* it. . . . If I am treated in this manner, I will not stay at this School. . . . Remember I told you . . . If you do not take notice of this, I will leave the School myself. . . .

Dr. Drury apologised for a "hasty word" that he was sorry his son had "ever uttered," but which was never intended to make as deep a wound as the letter intimates. The trouble was composed, and Henry Drury and Byron afterwards became very good friends.

In September of this year, at the end of the summer holidays, Byron again refused to return to school, but now for another reason, and this time unconditionally. Dr. Drury, asking Mrs. Byron for an explanation, and receiving no answer, applied to Hanson, the solicitor who managed the Byrons' affairs, and of whom we shall hear more. At the end of October the following reply was vouchsafed to Hanson's enquiries.

You may well be surprised, and so may Dr. Drury, that Byron is not returned to Harrow. But the Truth is, I cannot get him to return to school, though I have done all in my power for six weeks past. He has no indisposition that I know of, but love, desperate love, the *worst* of all *maladies* in my opinion. In short, the Boy is distractedly in love with Miss Chaworth. . . . If my son was of a proper age, and the lady *disengaged*, it is the last of all connexions I would wish to take place. . . . To prevent all trouble in future I am determined he shall not come here again till Easter; therefore, I beg you will find some proper situation for him at the next Holydays. I don't care what I pay. I wish Dr. Drury would keep him. . . .

Mrs. Byron with this sent a letter to her from Byron, who was staying away from home, saying that he knew he ought to return to Harrow, but begging for one more day's leave. The day expanded into three months, and Byron did not go back to school until the following January.

Newstead Abbey was now let, but Byron was attached to the place, and in this summer vacation it is said that he was in the habit of leaving his mother, who was in lodgings in Nottingham, to wander about the neighbourhood of his estate, sleeping at times in a small house known as "The Hut" near the lodge gates. After a short time, however, a room in the Abbey was placed at his disposal. On these excursions he renewed an ac-

PLATE IV

View of Harrow School

HARROW SCHOOL IN 1795

quaintance with the Chaworths, whose property adjoined his own, and with the daughter and heiress of the family, Mary Anne, he fell, as his mother says, "distractedly in love." She was two years older than he, and though in after-life, as will be told, she approached him again with some tenderness, at this time she paid no more regard to his advances than to treat him as a companionable schoolboy; if, indeed, she was always as kind as that, it being recorded that one day he overheard her saying to her maid, "Do you think I could care anything for that lame boy?" But, though the affection might mean little to her, it consumed Byron, and remained one of his most poignant recollections. He continued to believe that their union might have redeemed his life from many of its misfortunes, and in 1816 he recaptured the emotion of his early ardour in the verses of *The Dream*. In the meantime he spent these few months, a truant from school, steeping himself in romantic sentiment, making Miss Chaworth play amorous airs to him, following her about, arranging excursions with her, looking on with ill-concealed mortification while she danced, riding in a reverie beside her and her cousin, tormenting himself with stolen meetings and secret correspondence. These precautions seem hardly to have been necessary, since he came and went as he liked in the Chaworth household. At first he returned at nights to sleep at Newstead, but, on meeting a ghost in his way home one evening, he refused to do this any more, and thereafter on his visits to Annesley spent the night there. All this was, however, as has been said, of much greater concern to him than to her. Mary Chaworth, who was, it may be noted, descended from the victim of the wicked Lord Byron's notorious escapade, had indeed engaged her affections elsewhere before Byron's prolonged summer holiday was over. Two years later she married one John Musters, and lived to repent the day.

After this interlude Byron remained at Harrow until July 1805. Of his school exploits little more needs to be remarked. He cut some figure as an orator on three successive speech-days, and he took a leading part in the crisis that attended the appointment of a new head master on Dr. Drury's retirement, just before

Byron himself left the school. Byron supported the candidature of Mark Drury, the Doctor's brother, after, as Moore tells us, at first holding himself aloof from all parties. "Anxious, however, to have him as an ally, one of the Drury faction said to Wildman [the leader], 'Byron, I know, will not join, because he doesn't choose to act second to any one; but, by giving up the leadership to him, you may at once secure him.' This Wildman accordingly did, and Byron took command of the party." Dr. Butler, however, was elected, and under him Byron spent his last three months at Harrow, being also in his house. The champion of the defeated cause seems to have taken the reverse none too prettily. At the end of the term Butler asked him, as was customary, to dine with him in company with other senior boys. Byron sent an abrupt refusal, and, on being asked for a reason, explained, "If you should happen to come into my neighbourhood when I was staying at Newstead, I should certainly not ask you to dine with me, and, therefore, feel that I ought not to dine with you." Dr. Butler assured Moore, who had published this story in the first edition of his *Life*, that it had "but very little foundation in fact." What little it may have had, however, is true enough to Byron's character, as also is the fact that when he had left school he mended his manners, and behaved to Butler with becoming respect.

Before closing this brief account of Byron's schooldays there are a few circumstances worth recording of his life away from Harrow. In the summer of 1804 his mother took Burgage Manor at Southwell, within easy reach of Newstead. Here her son came to stay with her for his summer holidays in that year, and they provoked each other with growing pertinacity. Here also he made the acquaintance of a family named Pigot, of whom two of the younger members, Elizabeth and John, became his close friends and were among the first to recognise, and by their conversation to influence, the latent gift of poetry that was beginning to disclose itself. From the little that we know of them they appear as perhaps the most attractive and beneficial of his early friends. They lived on Southwell Green, in a house opposite Burgage Manor, and there he came and went at all hours

as it pleased him. Something of this pleasant association will be told later.[1]

The Christmas holidays of 1804-5 Byron spent with John Hanson and his family. The fact was that he would not face his mother's society again, and, having nowhere else in particular to go, he fell back on Hanson as a respectable connection of the family, to whom he could propose himself without too much enraging his mother, who could no more endure him out of her sight than she could in it. On December 1st, accordingly, he wrote to the lawyer:

My dear Sir,

Our vacation commences on the 5th of this month, when I propose to myself the pleasure of spending the Holidays at your House, if it is not too great an inconvenience. I tell you fairly that at Southwell I should have nothing in the world to do, but play cards and listen to the edifying conversation of old maids. . . . . I find that my poney and my pointers are not yet procured, and that Lord Grey is still at Newstead. The former I should be very dull at such a place as Southwell without; the latter is still more disagreeable to be with. . . . Your accommodation I have no doubt I shall be perfectly satisfied with, only do exterminate that *vile Generation of Bugs* which nearly ate me up the last time I *sojourned* at your House. . . .

The visit was a success, and repeated on several subsequent occasions. As time went on Hanson taxed Byron's patience very severely, by what the poet took to be dilatory business methods, and Byron, for his part, was a sufficiently troublesome client. But although a certain excess of legal astuteness may sometimes have marked Hanson's conduct, Hobhouse once dropping a hint that he was doubtful about his probity, he discharged a difficult trust faithfully, and served Byron diligently until the end. In later years Byron at a distance generally thought of him with a good deal of impatience, and was apt to remind him of his

[1] Little has changed in Southwell since Byron's boyhood. The Rev. Mr. Becher's house still stands, as does that of the Leacrofts, where Byron acted; Burgage Manor and the home of the Pigots, trim and dove-coloured both of them, still face each other across the top of the village green, thirty yards or so apart, more spectral, I think, than any other of Byron's English haunts; more so to-day even than Newstead.

position without ceremony; but in these early days he respected him, and met him on equal terms of friendship, and even affection.

3

But by far the most important intimacy that began to develop during Byron's last year at Harrow was that with his half-sister, Augusta. The first letter that we have from him to her is dated March 22nd, 1804. He was at that time sixteen years of age, and she twenty.[1] She was already engaged to her cousin, George Leigh, a Colonel of Dragoons, whom she married three years later. George Leigh makes no more than an occasional and indefinite appearance in Byron's history. Byron himself professed to have a poor opinion of him, but that may have meant little or much. He seems to have been the ordinary sporting soldier, enjoying some court favour, and not troubling his head about things that he did not understand. He and his wife lived together for over forty years, brought up seven children, and died within a year of each other. For the last thirty years of their life they were tenants, by royal patronage, of apartments in St. James's Palace. We should suppose, from the few indications we have, that it was a marriage of no marked graces or understanding, but we have no evidence to justify Lord Lovelace's assertion that Augusta was "abominably married to a first cousin." The colonel, it is true, was a financial duffer, but from the fact that at one crisis the Duke of Leeds (Augusta's half-brother, the son of her mother and Lord Carmarthen) petitioned Lord Liverpool on his behalf, we may take it that he was not dishonourably so. But that the Leighs were often seriously impoverished there is no doubt, and on one occasion at least Byron came handsomely to their rescue. A friend who stayed with them at Newmarket, before they removed to London, says that they lived "in a wretched small house, full of her ill-trained children, who were always running up and down stairs,

1 According to Lord Ernle, she was born in January 1783, but *Astarte* gives the date as January 26th, 1784.

and going into 'uncle's' bedroom, where he remained all the morning." "Uncle" was Byron.

The character of Augusta is, as we have pointed out, extremely difficult to realise. The known facts of her conduct towards Byron in themselves make this sufficiently so, and the testimony of independent witnesses does nothing to enlighten us. Lady Byron, after a long surfeit of brooding antagonism, at length persuaded herself that her sister-in-law was the victim of "a kind of moral idiotcy from birth," and communicated this conclusion to Mrs. Villiers on Augusta's death. Lady Byron's opinion in this matter is, however, not good currency. She had, indeed, only just before, sent a message of reconciliation to Augusta on her death-bed—"two words of affection, long since disused," were to be whispered to her: "Dearest Augusta."

Lord Lovelace, in a few striking pages of *Astarte*, gives a telling impression of Augusta, showing his own sensitive style to great advantage. He records Lady Byron's view with approval, but on his own account hardly goes as far as "moral idiotcy," though moving well in that direction. He places before us a high-spirited and sanguine woman, full of genial impulse and engaging good-fellowship, but unprincipled and unable to see that any conduct was wrong that inflicted obvious distress or injury on nobody. Her morality, we are told, began and ended in a simple faith in the far-reaching advantage of not being found out. Her life was a long struggle for self-preservation, fought with courage and cunning, but without discretion, honour, or lucidity of design. Uncertain or blind from the first as to the depth of her own shame, she cast about in all her associations for devices whereby she could deceive others as she deceived herself. Slowly she hardened her naturally generous heart, and came in time to live in a world of frigid reserve, covering herself from the shafts of censure by reticence and innuendo, and declining into an atrophied and bankrupt old age.

The objection, and it is a fatal one, to Lord Lovelace's highly finished sketch (as the water-colour catalogues say) is that it is founded almost entirely upon the joint authority of Lady Byron and Mrs. Villiers, the validity of which has already been exam-

ined. We have, otherwise, very little external indication of Augusta's character, favourable or otherwise. Moore takes her for granted in conventional terms, as a sister whom Byron cherished, because he did not see too much of her. Hobhouse is aware of her as a symbol in an equation, hardly as a personality. Galt and most of the others have even less to say about her. The Countess Guiccioli, whose *Recollections* have been held in general contempt, with what justice we shall see, presents Augusta as one of the most serene and fortunate influences upon Byron's life; but her testimony may be held to be as prejudiced in one direction as is Lord Lovelace's in another.

There is, also, a corresponding divergence of opinion as to Augusta's physical charms. The friend above quoted speaks summarily of her as a "Dowdy-Goody," while another authority asserts that she was "extremely unprepossessing in her person and appearance . . . and never can have had the least pretension to beauty." This, naturally, was very little to Lord Lovelace's purpose, who was interested to show that she was, in this respect, anything but unattractive, and he states roundly that "It is not true that Augusta Leigh was corporeally ill-favoured. She was in reality a charming woman, who exercised great fascination over all sorts of people in the brilliant society to which she belonged." Byron himself helps us little towards a decision, beyond the occasional use of such terms as "my pretty sister," which may have been in the ordinary way of endearment. The portraits that we have tend to confirm Lord Lovelace's opinion. That by George Hayter, made in 1812, shows, indeed, a face of strikingly handsome features and a mingled charm and power of expression; the miniature by Holmes, of about the same date, produces a less definite effect, but one that is by no means unpleasing. A third drawing, by Wageman, might stand for Byron's own Girl of Cadiz.

We have, then, chiefly to rely for our information as to Augusta Leigh upon the indications that we can gather from her own and Byron's letters.

At the beginning of 1804 there was between Byron and his half-sister hardly more than a casual acquaintance. On the birth

of Byron the infant Augusta was taken into unofficial adoption by her grandmother, Lady Holdernesse. Between this lady and the new Mrs. Byron there was no love lost, and Augusta was kept out of the way of the Byrons until Lady Holdernesse died in 1801. Mrs. Byron then wrote to her seventeen-year-old step-daughter, assuring her of the "inalterable regard and friendship" of herself and her son. After some such preliminary formalities of family esteem Augusta's interest in her small brother was established, and from March 1804 she becomes for over a year his most frequent correspondent. And his letters to her at once assume the tone of a chivalrous schoolboy towards an older sister, of whom he is frankly proud. His relations with his mother were steadily growing more difficult. In Augusta he suddenly realised, with a charming flush of enthusiasm, scope for that feudal sentiment that is not only inherent in all of us, but present, we may be sure, with peculiar emphasis in a lonely and imaginative boy, who has unexpectedly found himself the head of a great house. The girl who had thus come into his life with all the credentials of kinship, was not only an attractive sister who could engage his somewhat starved natural affections, she was also the only being in the world to whom he could speak by right in terms of unreserved intimacy, and upon whom he could exercise his instincts for responsibility and protection. Justice has, I think, never been done to the emotion with which this boy, so rich in the potential endowments of genius and so singularly poor in the domestic fortunes that he might have expected from his rank, must have come, at the approaching end of his nonage, into the enjoyment of this new, yet commanding relationship.

Great stress has been laid, by the *Astarte* school, upon the fervour of Byron's later letters to Augusta. But it is plainly unconvincing to discover, at a convenient stage in the correspondence, some sinister element in a fervour that had been in full flood from the beginning. "My ever dear Augusta," "I remain, more than words can express, your ever sincere, affectionate brother and friend," "My beloved Augusta," "My dear and beloved Augusta," "My beloved sister," "My dear girl,"

"Sister of mine"—these are the commonplaces with which the early letters are sprinkled. And the general character of these is even more affectionate than such expressions indicate. Lady Byron, in the frenzy of impeachment, exclaimed to Mrs. Villiers in 1816: "She [Augusta] has shown me . . . his letters to her . . . they are *absolute love letters*." Setting aside the two or three particular phrases that have been considered, the letters of 1816 were no more love-letters than those of 1804; and no one has yet been hardy enough to suggest that these last were signs of incipient depravity in the Byron of sixteen.

The first of the series that we have is written from Burgage Manor. Byron begins by attributing his remissness in answering Augusta's "kind and affectionate letters" to an inherent shyness of disposition, promises to mend his ways, and proceeds: "I hope you will consider me not only as a *Brother*, but as your warmest and most affectionate *Friend*, and, if ever circumstances should require it, your *protector*. Recollect, my Dearest Sister, that you are the *nearest relation* I have in *the world both by the ties of Blood* and *affection*." He sends his compliments to George Leigh, to whom Augusta is already engaged, saying, that whoever is beloved by her, will always be equally dear to him. The confidence thus established goes on steadily. He has now fallen out with Lord Grey of Ruthyn, the tenant of Newstead, for some obscure and inexpiable offence, which must remain for ever hidden in his own breast, though, if it could be revealed to anybody, she would be the first to be told. Letter by letter the tone of happy, but slightly surprised familiarity is maintained. He rallies her on tiring of the "Gaieties of the Metropolis," which he had thought were "particularly pleasing to *young ladies*." For himself, he detests London, being offended by such smoke and noise as defiled the urbanity of Piccadilly in 1804, but prefers it to Southwell, where he is bored to death, and begs her to send him a letter that shall "fill *twenty sheets* of paper" to console his tedium. In October of this year, Augusta's affair with George Leigh is encountering some difficulty, and Byron advises her to put him out of her head, or run off with him to Scotland and get married out of hand. He tells her about his

Harrow friends, of his tiffs with Drury—"this very morning I had a thundering Jobation from our Good Doctor"—and he charmingly gives her directions about coming down to hear him declaim on speech-day: "I would recommend you not to come without a Gentleman, as I shall be too much engaged all the morning to take care of you. . . . You had better be there by 12 o'clock, as we begin at 1, and I should like to procure you a good place; Harrow is 11 miles from town; it will just make a *comfortable* morning's drive for you. I don't know how you are to come, but for *Godsake* bring as few women with you as possible. . . . I *beg*, *Madam*, you may make your appearance in one of his Lordship's [Carlisle's] most dashing carriages, as our Harrow *etiquette* admits of nothing but the most *superb* vehicles, on our Grand *Festivals*. In the meantime, believe me, dearest Augusta. . . ." He tells her that he has been to see William Betty, "the young Roscius," act several times, and finds him tolerable, but "by no means equal to the ridiculous praises showered upon him." Also he is anxious about some dangerous equestrian exploit, of which he has heard that Augusta was the heroine.

But there is a recurrent theme in this correspondence of far more significance than these. Augusta becomes at once the recipient of all Byron's desperate complaints about his mother, and he unburdens himself of his grievance without reserve. It need hardly be said that the version he gives of the incessant friction is a passionately prejudiced one, but there is equally no question that, however much he was himself to blame, his relations with his mother as shown in these letters were a source of almost unrelieved misery to him. Not that he ever whines about it. With all his faults, Byron never learnt to whine, and, although he could, on occasion, let it be known that he thought himself very ill-used, he always did it with admirable spirit, even if once or twice, in misguided moments, he allowed himself to be baited into doing it a little unscrupulously. And, in these schoolboy letters, there is already, just redeemed from mania by a watchful humour, the dark strain of fury that came to govern, or leave ungoverned, all his mature dislikes and resentments. It

must, however, be remembered that these first manifestations were made not indiscriminately, but to the sister with whom, as has been seen, he considered himself to be on terms of exceptionally privileged confidence.

After a formal opening in the first letter of March 22nd to the effect that he has taken the opportunity to write while his mother is out, as he does not wish her to see his letters, we have no more than casual suggestions of disagreement until in August he breaks out with, "I can send nothing to amuse you, excepting a repetition of my complaints against my tormentor, whose *diabolical* disposition . . . seems to increase with age. . . . The more I see of her the more my dislike augments. . . ." Byron proceeds to describe the storms that shake the domestic scene, and says his mother "declares that she plainly sees I hate her, that I am leagued with her bitter enemies, viz., Yourself, L^{d} C[arlisle] and Mr. H[anson], and, as I never Dissemble or contradict her, we are all honoured with a multiplicity of epithets, too *numerous*, and some of them too *gross*, to be repeated." From this time the topic is clearly uppermost in Byron's mind whenever he writes to Augusta. In November he says that "the Dowager" is trying to compel him to reopen relations with Lord Grey de Ruthyn, which nothing will induce him to do, and that he is half inclined to believe that she is in love with the offending nobleman. If she persists in bullying him about this, he is determined no longer to submit to it. On the eleventh of the same month Byron's exasperation is in full cry. Writing to Augusta from Harrow, he is glad in the first place to hear that her opinion about Mrs. Byron coincides with his own, and then launches into a torrent of swirling invective. "Her temper is so variable, and, when inflamed, so furious, that I dread our meeting." She is full of vanity, "sinks her age a good six years," and is making a fool of herself with Lord Grey de Ruthyn. She upbraids Byron in fits of frenzy, abuses his father's name and that of the family in kind, and sets him such an example as, please God, he will never follow. He renounces her as a friend, whatever duty he may owe her as a son, and he will not shock Augusta with a recital of the scenes that outrage the household. Respect and

affection are no longer possible, and he looks forward eagerly to the day when he can disown maternal authority altogether. Lord Carlisle, under whose care Augusta is spending much of her time, would, Byron thinks, have little influence on this settled infirmity of temper; but he takes Augusta's word for his lordship's good-will, and thanks him for it. He then discloses to his sister his intention of avoiding all these convulsions in the coming holidays by going to stay with Hanson. On the seventeenth the attack—or defence—is renewed. He thanks Augusta for promising to help him—through Lord Carlisle's intervention presumably—but whatever happens he is determined to see his mother as little as possible; though, in the midst of his protests, he exclaims with a caprice of mood that was to become so familiar to his friends, "I do not wish to be separated from her entirely . . . for I do believe she likes me." This, however, is but a phrase, and he returns at once to the charge. Altogether, when every allowance has been made for Byron's florid histrionic sense, these are lamentable letters to have been wrung out of a boy's experience, and they confirm the impression that Mrs. Byron, while she may have been a fond mother, was certainly a disastrous one.

Augusta was induced by these complaints to write to Hanson, deprecating Mrs. Byron's behaviour in general terms, proposing that Byron should spend the coming holidays with Hanson, and suggesting that steps should be taken to engage Lord Carlisle's interest more actively in his ward. The Hanson project matured, as we have seen, and Byron responded to messages from his guardian by saying that he should think of him as being more friendly than he had supposed. A few weeks later he announces that he has dined with Lord Carlisle, and likes him very much on further acquaintance. And so it seems that, between them, Augusta, Hanson, and Lord Carlisle did something to alleviate the boy's discomfort, and even to encourage him in asserting his independence. But the letters are continued in the same chafing tone. In April 1805 he writes at the end of the Easter vacation that although things have been better than he expected they have been bad enough to make him spend not a day longer

at Southwell than he could help, and that his mother ("who is at this minute thundering against Somebody or other below in the Dining-Room") has forbidden him to visit Lord Carlisle's house, an instruction that he will certainly disobey in order to see his sister. Mrs. Byron began to suspect and resent Augusta's interventions, and in June Byron writes from Harrow: "At last you have a *decent* specimen of the dowager's talents for epistles in the *furioso* style. You are now freed from the *shackles* of her correspondence. . . . She is, as I have before declared, certainly mad; . . . her conduct is a *happy* compound of derangement and Folly." He has just received a letter from his mother which is "the finishing stroke to *filial*, which now gives way to *fraternal* duty. Believe me, dearest Augusta, not ten thousand *such* mothers, or indeed any mothers, could induce me to give you up." In July he tells Augusta that he has been to Cambridge to enter himself at Trinity College, and we read of a conspiracy between them and Hanson to bluff Mrs. Byron about the date when holidays begin so that he and Augusta may be able to see something of each other in London. In August he is back at Southwell, where he finds his domestic society as little genial as ever. However, he means to endure no more than a month of it, when he will pay some visits before going up to Cambridge. Arrangements have been made by the Chancellor whereby Mrs. Byron is to be further provided for out of the estate, and Byron now feels himself to be on the point of final emancipation. "As I am to have a very handsome allowance . . . I shall be perfectly independent of her, and, as she has long trampled upon, and harrowed up every affectionate tie, it is my serious determination never again to visit, or be upon friendly terms with her." Part of September Byron spent with Hanson at Farleigh, near Basingstoke, and in October he went into residence at Cambridge.

4

Galt observes that Byron's life at the University was the least remarkable part of his career, and, externally, this is so. As an undergraduate he had his wine parties, at which he was gen-

erally out-drunk with some ease by robuster performers, practised diving into fourteen feet of the "not very translucent" Cam for plates and shillings, formed enthusiastic but mostly ephemeral friendships, enjoyed musical evenings, and did a little work. Apart from university routine, which he followed with a natural irregularity, he was, however, active enough. Moore prints a list of books that Byron had read by the time he was twenty. It is a formidable one, and includes some fifty volumes of history, most of them substantial, such as Hume, Holinshed, Froissart, Gibbon, Livy, Tacitus, and works on Russia, Sweden, Turkey, and a dozen other countries; some biography, including Robertson's *Charles the Fifth* and Johnson's *Lives;* a little law, with Blackstone; Paley, Locke, Hume, and Berkeley among the philosophers, also Hobbes, whom he says he detests; some geography; "all the British Classics" in poetry to be found in Johnson and Anderson—which amounts, it may almost be said, to the *corpus* then known, and "most of the living poets," some French poets, a few Italian, Greek and Latin without number, but these last he means to give up in the future; the orators, Demosthenes, Cicero, and the Parliamentary Debates from the Revolution to the year 1742; of the Divines, "Blair, Porteus, Tillotson, Hooker—all very tiresome. I abhor books of religion, though I reverence and love my God, without the blasphemous notions of sectaries, or belief in their absurd and damnable heresies, mysteries, and Thirty-nine Articles"; and finally, among "Miscellanies," *The Spectator*, *The Rambler*, and novels by the thousand. Byron was, moreover, preparing material for his first book of poems, and had already written a good deal of it. So that even in his youth we find that inconsistency between an apparent negligence and actual performance that was to be so striking a feature of his later life. A superficial observation of his Cambridge years reveals a well-to-do young nobleman, without moorings or ambitions, indulging irresponsible fancies as they came, jollying through the University with little credit if with no particular offence, and unaware of any but transient obligations to himself or anyone else. All this side of his existence he displayed without reserve and even boisterously. But

there was another side, in which he was far more fully absorbed, but about which he said little, which indeed he must have been at some pains to conceal, since so little is heard of it in his correspondence. He was, consciously and assiduously, preparing himself to be a poet.

On going to Cambridge, Byron was allowed five hundred pounds a year, a servant, and a horse. He found the University, he says, given over to eating, drinking, disputing and punning, and the Muses totally neglected. But he enjoyed his freedom, and soon began to like the place. He orders, through Hanson, a dozen each of Port, Sherry, Claret and Madeira, and furnishes his rooms with an allowance specially made for the purpose. By the end of November he is at odds with Hanson, who has been complaining of extravagance, and he tells the lawyer that he is forgetting himself and may, in effect, go to the devil. This was an early display of Byron's overbearing attitude whenever he was vexed by the Hansons of the world. On this occasion he acknowledged his indebtedness for Hanson's hospitality gracefully enough, but he says "in the present instance I have been completely deceived. . . . I stipulated that not only my furniture, but even my Gowns and books, should be paid for that I might set out free from *Debt*. Now with all the *Sang Froid* of your profession you tell me that not only shall I not be permitted to repair my rooms . . . but that I shall not even be indemnified for my present expence. In one word, hear my determination . . ."—which determination is that he will not pay for these things out of his allowance, and Hanson may do what he likes about it. He stumbles into a charge of duplicity, for which a week later he rightly has to apologise. Hanson was, in fact, doing no more than might be expected of a prudent lawyer handling a wilful and very quick-witted young client, but he was not doing it with conspicuous tact.

After a somewhat desultory attendance on terms, Byron decided to leave Cambridge in the middle of 1807, but changed his mind and stayed on another year, taking his degree in July 1808. He had by then enlarged his experience decisively beyond the promise of his early training, and he had made his first

bid for public attention; but the recorded development of those years took place more notably elsewhere than at Cambridge. Though his note-books were, we may be sure, as busily employed in one place as another, and it was in these that the real development was going on.

Byron's first Cambridge vacation, which indeed extended through the Lent term of 1806, was spent with his mother in London, in lodgings at 16 Piccadilly. He continues his correspondence with Augusta, telling her that "the Dowager has thought proper to solicit a reconciliation, which in some measure I have agreed to." This is on December 26th, and on the next day he writes again, pledging Augusta to the strictest secrecy regarding the matter on which he now confides in her, namely, that he is in debt and is going to a money-lender. He wants Augusta to stand as collateral guarantee with himself. The security he can offer for repayment at his coming of age or earlier death is, of course, a perfectly good one against the chance of her liability having to be met. Most of his friends are in the same difficulty as himself, he is too proud to apply to the others, his relations he detests, and he will "not be tormented by the advice of Guardians," or that "chattering Puppy Hanson." So he makes this private appeal to Augusta; he knows she will help him if she can—if she cannot, then let her be silent or all friendship between them is at an end, though he begs her pardon for using words that may sound like a threat.

Augusta apparently consented, as on January 7th, 1806, Byron writes that "these sordid Bloodsuckers" have agreed to furnish the required sum by the twentieth, and that they will settle the matter together on her arrival in town. By the end of February, however, he, his mother, and Hanson are wrangling again over money matters, and Mrs. Byron complains that her son has bought a carriage, given thirty guineas to Pitt's statue, has fallen into bad hands, and will be the death of her. In March he tells Hanson that he has already borrowed some money, but must get more. Hanson promptly sends advice but no cash, and is told that he can keep what is not wanted. These effervescences are all about sums trifling enough by the standard of Byron's

fortune, but they are prophetic of the greater confusion that beset him when he came into full control of his estate. "He was," says Galt, "the least qualified for any sort of business of all men I have ever known," though it must be added that in later life he kept a very shrewd and sometimes disconcerting eye on his accounts.

5

In the summer of this year he tried Southwell again, but an explosion of maternal temper—according to Moore, this time with a poker—sent him precipitately back to London and thence to the south coast early in August, and a little later he went with his friend John Pigot to Harrogate. This visit is important as bringing us for the first time into close contact with Byron the poet. From Harrogate John Pigot writes to his sister Elizabeth: "Lord B. is now *poetising*, and, since he has been here, has written some very pretty verses." To this letter Byron adds a postscript, saying that his correspondent, who has regretted that his poems were not more extensive, may be interested to hear that they are now nearly doubled. Byron's first book was, in fact, now in the press, the printers being S. & J. Ridge of Newark. It made its first appearance at the end of 1806, as *Fugitive Pieces*, but was immediately suppressed on account of the objection raised by another Southwell friend, the Rev. J. T. Becher, to the poem entitled *To Mary*, which Byron never reprinted. This volume has now become one of the chief bibliographical rarities of our poetical literature, only four copies being known to exist.

The winter was not an inactive one. Writing to Lord Clare, one of the Harrow friends in whom he retained an affectionate interest, he says: "My time has been much occupied with very different pursuits. I have been *transporting* a servant, who cheated me—rather a disagreeable event; performing in private theatricals; publishing a volume of poems (at the request of my friends, for their perusal); making love—and taking physic." The theatricals took place with some Southwell friends after his return from Harrogate, and there are very favourable accounts

of Byron's acting, which are no doubt as reliable as dramatic criticism in this respect usually is. His love-making at this time included an affair with a young lady whose brother became uppish about it and, according to Moore, wanted to call Byron out. This seems to have been an exaggeration, but on the advice of a friend the young enthusiast found it expedient at least to make a formal resignation of his suit.

On the suppression of *Fugitive Pieces*, Byron at once began to revise and expand the volume, and his juvenile poems made their second appearance in January 1807, as *Poems on Various Occasions*. A hundred copies only were printed, and the book is now only less scarce than its predecessor. Later in the year this was in turn followed by *Hours of Idleness*, on the title-page of which Byron's name as author was given for the first time. Ridge of Newark was still the publisher, but he was now working in conjunction with a number of London booksellers, whose names are included in the imprint. A further revised edition was issued in 1808 under the title *Poems Original and Translated*, but it was with the *Hours of Idleness* of 1807 that Byron first challenged critical opinion, and it is this volume that stands for his earliest performance in poetry.

The work, precocious in many ways as it is, has all the faults of the most unprecociously youthful production. It is often banal in sentiment, jejune in expression, tasteless in form, and tedious in occasion. It was an easy mark for destructive criticism, as any book produced at the age of twenty must be, and as the Edinburgh reviewers discovered to their unexpected cost. But we may easily enough persuade ourselves that it is not only in the light of later achievement that we see a good deal more in it than that. Examples of what often seems to be anything but a promising immaturity can be taken from almost any page, but it would have needed no great indulgence to set beside these some of the better things of which there are many in the book. No one could be asked on this evidence to predict an illustrious future for Byron as a poet, but a candid mind must have found many traces of a gift that might very well develop to some purpose. There is deftness in such lines as:

There in apartments small and damp,
The candidate for College prizes
Sits poring by the midnight lamp;
Goes late to bed, yet early rises.

He surely well deserves to gain them,
With all the honours of his college,
Who, striving hardly to obtain them,
Thus seeks unprofitable knowledge:

Who sacrifices hours of rest
To scan precisely metres Attic;
Or agitates his anxious breast
In solving problems mathematic:
. . . . .
Renouncing every pleasing page
From authors of historic use;
Preferring to the letter'd sage
The square of the hypothenuse.

And there is, however faintly, a hint of something more than deftness in:

Oh! may the happy mortal, fated
To be, by dearest ties, related,
For her each hour new joys discover,
And lose the husband in the lover!
May that fair bosom never know
What 'tis to feel the restless woe
Which stings the soul, with vain regret,
Of him who never can forget.

There was, moreover, already a note here and there of a gift that Byron had of writing lines that, little as they might satisfy fastidious poetic standards, would live in men's memories with a certain glamour:

England! thy beauties are tame and domestic
To one who has roved o'er the mountains afar:
Oh, for the crags that are wild and majestic!
The steep frowning glories of dark Loch na Garr.

While that is not very good poetry, it still has a note of its own. But, above any particular instances of merit, there is in *Hours*

of Idleness as a whole a shadowy suggestion of power and emotional fertility that might have warned a sympathetic judgment that this was not quite an ordinary boy's work. No one will maintain that the book is by any but relative standards remarkable, but the cumulative impression that it produces is an unusual one to be made by a poet in his nonage. We need claim no more for it than that; but, as we know, in some quarters a good deal less was allowed.

At first the book had some success. Writing to Miss Pigot on August 2nd, 1807, Byron says that while Ridge may not "proceed rapidly in Notts," he would have her know that things in London are different, and that "a man whose works are praised by *reviewers*, admired by *duchesses*, and sold by every bookseller of the metropolis, does not dedicate much consideration to *rustic readers*." His London agent has disposed of his second supply and ordered a third, he sees his name in every bookseller's window, the Duchess of Gordon has desired that he should be presented to her in order that she may claim her relationship with the poet of the hour, and, although he is enjoying his fame in secret, his laurels have turned his brain. Forthcoming criticism may, however, restore the balance—which it did.

The Critical Review, *Literary Recreations*, and *The Anti-Jacobin Review* praised him with some fervour, but *The Eclectic Review* sounded a note of insolent disparagement that was shortly to be adopted with the much more formidable authority of *The Edinburgh Review*. Byron knew beforehand that it was going to happen. He writes to Becher in February 1808: "A most violent attack is preparing for me in the next number of *The Edinburgh Review*. This I had from the authority of a friend who has seen the proof and manuscript of the critique." Byron believed, mistakenly as he afterwards learnt, that the attack was launched under the patronage of Holland House. On February 27th, a day later than his letter to Becher, he tells Hobhouse that he is "cut to atoms by the *E— Review*," and, in intention, cut to atoms he was.

The notice opens thus: "The poesy of this young lord belongs to the class which neither God nor man are said to permit.

Indeed we do not recollect to have seen a quantity of verse with so few deviations in either direction from that standard." This sets the key of stiff and high-flown irony in which the whole is written. Such a mood has no difficulty in finding full scope among the puerilities of *Hours of Idleness*, and the reviewer runs up his score with great self-satisfaction. A few excerpts will sufficiently display his talents:

[Byron's] effusions are spread over a dead flat, and can no more get above or below the level than if they were so much stagnant water . . . the noble author is peculiarly forward in pleading minority . . . the law upon the point of minority we hold to be perfectly clear. It is a plea available only to the defendant . . . if any case could be brought against Lord Byron, for the purpose of compelling him to put into court a certain quantity of poetry . . . an exception [might] be taken were he to deliver *for poetry* the contents of this volume. To this he might plead *minority;* but as he now makes voluntary tender of the article, he hath no right to sue on that ground for the price in good current praise, should the goods be unmarketable . . . it is this consideration [his rank] only that induces us to give Lord Byron's poems a place in our *Review*, besides our desire to counsel him, that he do forthwith abandon poetry, and turn his talents, which are considerable, and his opportunities, which are great, to better account. . . . Now we positively do assert that there is nothing better than these stanzas [from the very indifferent set of verses *On Leaving Newstead Abbey*] in the whole compass of the noble minor's volume.

Galt, who, although in his personal relations with Byron he was always a little like a cat on hot bricks, was in many respects a much more important critic of Byron's poetry than has been recognised, pertinently observes that it is evident that the review was not just, "by the degree of care and artificial point with which it has been drawn up." He argues fairly that if the book were so worthless it could not have been worth so much attention, and he adds with a rather pretty directness:

It is amusing to compare the respective literary reputations of the poet and critic, as they are estimated by the public, now that the one is dead, and the other dormant. The voice of all the age acknowledges Byron to have been the greatest poetical

genius of his time. Mr. Jeffrey, though still enjoying the renown of being a shrewd and intelligent critic of the production of others, has established no right to the honour of being an original, or eminent author.

Galt's claim for Byron we know to be an exaggerated one, though European opinion, with its imperfect knowledge of English poetry, has always endorsed it. Moreover, his effect is a little lowered by the circumstance that Jeffrey did not write the review. Galt's observations, however, apply with equal point to Brougham, who did. Brougham himself, though one would hardly suspect it from the style of the notice, was a young man at the time; but he was thirty, and old enough to know better.

Moore, whose early work also had been censured by the *Edinburgh* and who had later become one of Jeffrey's contributors, was a little embarrassed when he came to deal with this incident in the *Life*. He got out of his difficulty gracefully enough by at once reprimanding the reviewer and excusing him on the plea that while he should have spoken more civilly he was under no obligation to speak more favourably of a book that after all had little positive merit. *Blackwood's*, in the person of "Christopher North" Wilson, dismissed this as a vain attempt "to wash the greasy face of a stupid slanderer," while *The Quarterly Review* came down even more bluntly with "Himself [Moore] a distinguished victim and prop of that journal . . . contrives to drop no hint of what every human being felt at the time to be the simple truth of the whole matter—to wit, that out of the thousand and one volumes of indifferent verse, which happened to be printed in the year of grace, 1807, only one bore a noble name on the title-page; and the opportunity of insulting a lord, under pretext of admonishing a poetaster, was too tempting to be resisted, in a particular quarter, at that particular time." Of *Hours of Idleness* Byron himself is reported by Medwin to have said twelve years later: "For a man to become a poet he must be in love or miserable. I was both when I wrote the *Hours of Idleness*: some of those poems, in spite of what the reviewers say, are as good as any I ever produced." The

effect of the *Edinburgh* notice upon him was to put him in a wholesome rage, to make him drink three bottles of claret, and to send him back with renewed ardour and fresh ideas to a satire upon which he was engaged. The *Edinburgh* has often been credited with having inspired *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, but already by October 1807 Byron had been able to tell Miss Pigot that he had completed a poem of 380 lines. This was *British Bards*, which, on the appearance of the *Edinburgh* article, Byron enlarged by the addition of more than a hundred lines, and had privately printed in a volume of which only one copy now exists. The bibliographical details of the satire need not be examined here, but the poem underwent sundry revisions before it was published, nearly seven hundred lines long, in March 1809. But that date is a little in advance of our narrative.

Byron's early poems went expectedly well among his friends and acquaintances. His mother was proud of them, or at least she gave tongue fluently on the subject of *The Edinburgh Review*. The Pigots were enthusiastic, as was Becher, with moral reservations. Hanson approved, Hobhouse, as we have seen, forgave the white hat and grey coat on their account, Augusta "liked some of them very much," William Bankes, William Harness, and Francis Hodgson, Cambridge friends and all men of some parts, were complimentary, and the young poet received flattering messages from strangers such as Henry Mackenzie, the then celebrated author of *The Man of Feeling*, and Lord Woodhouselee, whom Robert Burns had once referred to as a fine fellow. Of much more consequence than these tributes, however, was the interest taken in the publication by Robert Charles Dallas, of whom mention has been already made. Dallas, who was an industrious man of letters, was more than thirty years older than Byron, and the brother of the poet's aunt by marriage. He read *Hours of Idleness* shortly after its publication, genuinely admired the talent he found there, and quite properly used his slender family connection as an introduction to the young kinsman whom he had not seen since his infancy. In January 1808 he wrote a sententious letter to Byron, that was nevertheless not lacking in appreciation or disinterested candour. The acquain-

tance thus begun had important results, particularly for Dallas himself, as we shall see. After some formal compliments, Dallas proceeds in his letter to assure Byron of his confidence in the moral purpose of his muse. He finds in some of the verses before him a spirit reminding him of another noble author, "the good Lord Lyttelton." Byron, in his reply, welcomes Dallas's overtures, and acknowledges the kind things said of his poetry; but he regrets that he has often been said to resemble not the estimable author of the *Monody*, but his son, Thomas, notoriously known as "the wicked Lord Lyttelton." Dallas was shocked, but refused to believe that there was any truth in the comparison—"No, no: you are not like him—you *shall not* be like him, except in eloquence." He proposes to call in the course of a few days at Albemarle Street, where Byron is now staying at Dorant's Hotel. Byron answers at once that he will be glad to see him, but warns him that in morals he prefers Confucius to the Ten Commandments and Socrates to St. Paul, that he will not take the Sacrament because he does not think that an earthly vicar can make him an inheritor of heaven, and that he believes virtue to be a feeling or disposition and not a principle, and death to be an eternal sleep, of the body at least—in short, that he is unquestionably the wicked George, Lord Byron. But he is, for all this half callow and half humorous affectation, at some pains to tell Dallas about his studies and tastes, and he is clearly interested in his new correspondent. A little mystified, Dallas called a few days later, was cordially received, and accepted an invitation to dinner. After this they met frequently for some months, until Byron left London late in the spring, and Dallas heard no more of him for the rest of the year. Early in 1809, however, a note came from Reddish's Hotel, in St. James's Street, making an appointment for Sunday morning, January 22nd. Dallas duly attended, to find that it was the poet's twenty-first birthday.

6

A poor sort of a coming of age, it would seem, for a landed peer. There were celebrations at Newstead, but family festivities

were not to be faced. So that Hanson was sent down to preside there while Byron himself spent his birthday drifting about the purlieus of Reddish's Hotel. Dallas, nevertheless, found him in high spirits, but so tempering his gaiety with "good manners and . . . kindness, that . . . I felt a hope that by adopting forbearance I might do him some service in an occasional argument or sentiment." Dallas, in these records, cannot do himself justice, presenting himself as something short of the man whom Byron certainly liked, and trusted with, indeed, an unaccountable generosity in their later dealings.[1] On this January morning, however, Byron's exuberance was not wholly amiable. He was, in fact, in a fury with Lord Carlisle, and not without reason.

It has been shown that the second issue of Byron's juvenilia, *Poems on Various Occasions*, was published in January 1807. Augusta received two copies from Mrs. Byron, and a third from Hanson, and it was in writing to Hanson on this occasion that she said that she "liked some of the poems very much," but added that she had not dared to show these to Lord Carlisle for fear that he would disapprove of others. About the end of June in the same year the edition known as *Hours of Idleness* came out, and Byron himself seems to have sent a copy of this to Carlisle, for he writes to Miss Pigot on July 13th, "Lord Carlisle, on receiving my poems sent, before he opened the book, a tolerably handsome letter: I have not heard from him since. His opinions I neither know nor care about. . . . He said he had not had time to read the contents, but thought it necessary to acknowledge the receipt of the volume immediately. Perhaps the Earl '*bears no brother near the throne*,' [Carlisle himself wrote verses]—*if so*, I will make his *sceptre* totter *in his hands*." In November the printers were preparing the fourth issue, *Poems Original and Translated*, but this did not appear until after the end of February 1808, at which date Byron was still sending in corrections. In the meantime his mood had changed, for some reason that is not apparent, and in the new volume the following dedication appeared for the first time:

[1] Byron afterwards complained of Dallas's ingratitude; but that was several years ahead.

TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE FREDERICK, EARL OF CARLISLE

KNIGHT OF THE GARTER, ETC., ETC.,
THE SECOND EDITION OF THESE POEMS IS INSCRIBED
BY HIS OBLIGED WARD AND AFFECTIONATE KINSMAN,
THE AUTHOR

Whatever may have prompted it, this compliment seems to have missed fire altogether. It has been explained that Lord Carlisle was a sick man at this time, and unable to attend to such things; but his neglect can hardly be explained by Lord Ernle's suggestion that he never saw the dedication, and must be accounted to him for shabbiness.[1] Dallas says that he had often heard him speak bitterly of "that nobleman, whose applause he had courted for his juvenile poetry, and from whom he had received a frigid answer and little attention."

Byron's birthday displeasure had, however, another source than this discourtesy to his muse. The time had come, on attaining his majority, for him to take his seat in the House of Lords. Swallowing his sense of injury about the poems, he had approached Lord Carlisle, not alone as the only kinsman that he had in the House, but as his only acquaintance there upon whom he had the slightest claim, reminding him that he was about to come of age, and expecting, as was reasonable, that his lordship would offer to introduce him at the forthcoming opening of Parliament. His lordship did nothing of the sort, but instead favoured his ward with coldly formal instructions as to procedure. Whereupon, naturally enough, Byron was incensed, and paid his guardian out soundly in the satire that was now preparing for the press:

[1] The sequence of events in this affair does not seem to have been set out quite clearly hitherto. Moore associates Byron's letter to Miss Pigot, quoted above, with Lord Carlisle's reception of the dedication, whereas there was no dedication at that date; Lord Ernle ascribes the dedication to *Hours of Idleness*, in which actual volume it did not appear, and seems to infer that it had been made when Augusta wrote her letter to Hanson.

No muse will cheer, with renovating Smile,
The paralytic puling of Carlisle.
The puny schoolboy and his early lay
Men pardon, if his follies pass away;
But who forgives the Senior's ceaseless verse,
Whose hairs grow hoary as his rhymes grow worse?

He was afterwards shocked by the suggestion that readers might suspect a reference to a nervous disorder from which Carlisle was suffering in "paralytic puling," and at length made some amends by a line in the passage of *Childe Harold* celebrating the death of Carlisle's son at Waterloo:

Their praise is hymned by loftier harps than mine;
Yet one I would select from that proud throng,
Partly because they blend me with his line,
And partly that I did his Sire some wrong.

The truth, no doubt, is that Byron was in his elderly cousin's busy and ailing life a very insignificant personage, and easily overlooked. It is, perhaps, simpler for us to see how inconsiderate Carlisle was, than it was for him to realise it himself. However that may be, Byron wrote to his mother that Lord Carlisle had used him infamously, and his appearance in the House was delayed by technical details in the negotiation of which he could find no experienced friend to help him. It was in this temper that he had summoned Dallas, and sent him back home on that Sunday morning to read over a number of loose printed sheets in quarto, entitled *The British Bards*.

Two days later, Dallas wrote saying that he had read the satire with infinite pleasure, and that in his opinion it rivalled Gifford's *Baviad* and *Mæviad*, which he meant to be sensational praise. It is clear from his letter that Byron has deputed him to arrange for publication—"I shall delay the printing as little as possible; but I have some apprehension as to the readiness of my publishers to undertake the sale . . . if not I will employ some other." He submits an alternative title, *The Parish Poor of Parnassus*, suggests the modification of a few lines, and by a happy thought proposes Crabbe for a place among "the genuine

sons of Apollo," a hint that resulted in the addition of one of the best passages of the poem:

> There be who say, in these enlightened days,
> That splendid lies are all the poet's praise,
> That strained Invention, ever on the wing,
> Alone impels the modern Bard to sing:
> 'Tis true, that all who rhyme—nay, all who write,
> Shrink from that fatal word to Genius—Trite;
> Yet Truth sometimes will lend her noblest fires,
> And decorate the verse herself inspires:
> This fact in Virtue's name let Crabbe attest;
> Though Nature's sternest Painter, yet the best.

During the next few weeks Byron was engaged in making revisions of the poem, and Dallas in discussing these and finding a publisher. Dallas's own firm, Longman & Co., were scared by the asperity of the work and declined it, a timidity for which they afterwards paid, by losing the offer of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The publication was finally placed in the hands of James Cawthorn, of 24 Cockspur Street, who, however, did not by the same token profit by this enterprise, since when it came to publishing *Childe Harold*, Byron would not give it him, in spite of Dallas's wish, saying that he did not "stand high enough in the trade."

As the date of publication drew near, the technical difficulties about Byron's admission to the House of Lords had been overcome, and he was ready to present himself to the Lord Chancellor. On March 13th Dallas, passing down St. James's Street, saw Byron's coach outside Reddish's, and, being now on terms of daily familiarity, called in. The poet, agitated and even paler than usual, told him that he was about to proceed to Westminster, alone. He requested Dallas to accompany him. For a few moments they discussed the new poem, the last sheets of which were now in the press, and then set off together. Dallas would have had to be a good deal less impressionable than he was not to have felt the poignancy of the occasion. On his arrival Byron was received by officials, to whom he paid the statutory fees. Lord Eldon was, thereupon, informed of his presence, and

a little later Byron made his entry into an almost empty House. Unsponsored and plainly mortified, he passed the Woolsack without acknowledgment, and took the oath from the officer in attendance. Dallas then watched the Chancellor rise and approach Byron with a smile and some complimentary phrase. The provocation under which the young peer was acting was, it must be allowed, considerable; but his failure in tact at this moment was hardly less clumsy on that account. He received Eldon's approaches with set formality, and to the Chancellor's apology for the delay that had occurred through the necessities of his duty, he replied bluntly that his lordship had done his duty and no more. Eldon very naturally left it at that, and returned to his seat. Byron for a few minutes took a place on one of the empty benches, and shortly afterwards left the House, not to enter it again until his return from abroad more than two years later.

7

Within a few days of this incident *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* was published. Its success was immediate, the first edition of a thousand copies being rapidly sold out. We must, however, look back a little over the preceding months. Byron's later days at Cambridge—if those days can be said to have been spent at Cambridge which were mostly spent away from it—saw him flourishing as a man of somewhat promiscuous fashion. He kept table, he says, with jockeys, gamblers, boxers, parsons, and poets, he had a tame bear, he swam the Thames from Lambeth to Blackfriars, he fraternised with Gentleman Jackson, the heavyweight champion of England, with whom he sparred at Brighton and elsewhere, "coming up well to the blows" the champion tells us, and with Mr. Henry Angelo, the fencing master, on whose account he once came into conflict with the Mayor of Cambridge. Byron was, indeed, now as always devoted to athletic exercises, though after his early youth he actively disliked field sports. He presented one of his Southwell admirers with a thimble that he had brought up three times successively from the bottom of the river, and he nearly killed another through his habit of firing at

a mark on every opportunity. This last remained his favourite amusement, and Medwin says that at Pisa he put eleven out of twelve shots into a four-inch target—on which occasion he remarked that Shelley would be a much better shot than himself, if he would stop thinking about metaphysics when he was firing. Galt, with less warmth than Medwin, says of another shooting party that Byron was the best shot, "but not pre-eminently so." Medwin also says that Byron was an "admirable horseman, combining grace with the security of his seat," but Byron himself confessed to being "a spice of everything, except a jockey."

On leaving Cambridge he spent most of his time at Newstead until his arrival in London, at the date Dallas mentions, in January 1809. While at his country seat in the autumn of 1808 he begins to talk of going abroad early in the coming year, and to make arrangements with his mother for her tenancy during his absence. After the publication of his satire, he returned to the country for a time, and among his diversions was the entertainment of a party of Cambridge friends, Hobhouse one of them, who breakfasted after noon, dined at eight, and, masquerading as monks, drank burgundy—out of a human skull—till three in the morning, when they had tea and went to bed. In London Byron spent himself as freely, telling a correspondent of "routs, riots, balls, and boxing-matches, cards . . . masquerades, love, and lotteries . . . opera-singers and oratorios, wine, women, wax-works, and weather-cocks." Not that he constantly lived at this pace; he was, indeed, already falling into the irregularities of life that, rather than excesses, ruined his constitution. He would pass from extremes of indulgence to extremes of abstinence, the one as injurious as the other. Stanhope, a friend of his later life, was convinced that it was this twofold intemperance that killed him. Byron was, in fact, more often violently abstemious than flushed in his living, existing for long periods on a little soda-water, bread, and vegetables. For one thing, he quickly learnt that next morning would make no compromise with him, and for another he had a horror of the corpulence to which he was naturally inclined. When he was eighteen he weighed over

fourteen stone; by the time he was twenty-three he had reduced himself, by much physic, abstinence, and hot baths, to less than ten. But that he was proof against temptation is hardly within this or any other brief for Byron.

Those days spent at Newstead in the later months of 1808, however, afford a striking example of the insecurities of biography, and these following observations might be applied with equal force to any term of Byron's life, as they might to any life that we consider. Our information about Byron is unusually ample. We know more about him, from a great variety of sources, than perhaps about any other figure in our literature until quite recent times. It is true that Boswell gives us two years of Johnson's life in unexampled detail; but Byron was his own Boswell for a lifetime, and his industry was supported by a dozen collaborators. And yet we constantly find ourselves touching the real life of the man only at infrequent points, and we have to pause to consider what was really happening in those long intervals of silence. Between the time of his leaving Cambridge, for example, and the publication of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* there elapsed a period of nearly nine months. During that time we have twenty-one of his letters. Seven of these are to Dallas, mostly brief notes, about the publishing of his poem; three are to his mother, telling her that he is having Newstead done up, that the Hansons, who are staying there, have to sleep out, that he intends to go abroad, that he is making suitable financial provision for her, that he is going to an Infirmary Ball, and that he may become a politician; then, that he has been trying to assist the family of a friend who has been killed in a duel, that whatever his money difficulties may be he will not sell Newstead, that Lord Carlisle has behaved abominably as aforesaid, and that the prospects for the sale of his satire are good; three are to Hanson, inviting him to be at Newstead for the coming of age celebrations, telling him of his political interests and his projected travels, and for the rest confined to money matters; three are to Hodgson, one asking him to join Hobhouse and himself at Newstead, and telling him of a dinner-party in the neighbourhood, one recording the death of a favourite dog, his potations

with Hobhouse, a quarrel with the Duke of Portland, and trying to persuade his friend to accept the invitation already sent, and the last about a boy who wants to get into Eton, and a publican who has already got into gaol; two are to Augusta, congratulating her on the birth of her first child, and gossiping about his life at Newstead, which, he says, apart from unsolicited visits from the neighbouring nobility and gentry, is entirely secluded; two are to Jackson, the boxer, about a pony, a bill, and a dog; and one is to Becher about a play he means to perform at Newstead, and asking for a carpenter to be sent over.

This bald summary is significant. We may add to it a little supplementary evidence—Dallas's notes, a few lines from Moore, a letter or two from Mrs. Byron or another, a stray reminiscence perhaps from Byron's own later memoranda, and a few vivid details collected by the industry of Lord Ernle or Mr. Coleridge. But, all told, how much of the occupations of nine months is accounted for? What we have got is suggestive enough, full of indications as to character and interests, but clearly there are days and weeks, even months, when Byron was intent upon affairs of which no record is left in his fertile correspondence or in the annals that were already beginning to bring him into history. It is of this life that we have to construct such a verity as we can from the indications that we have. It is true that the period chosen for this illustration is less fully documented than his later years, when he had become a figure of almost universal attention, but the principle is one to be kept steadily in mind.

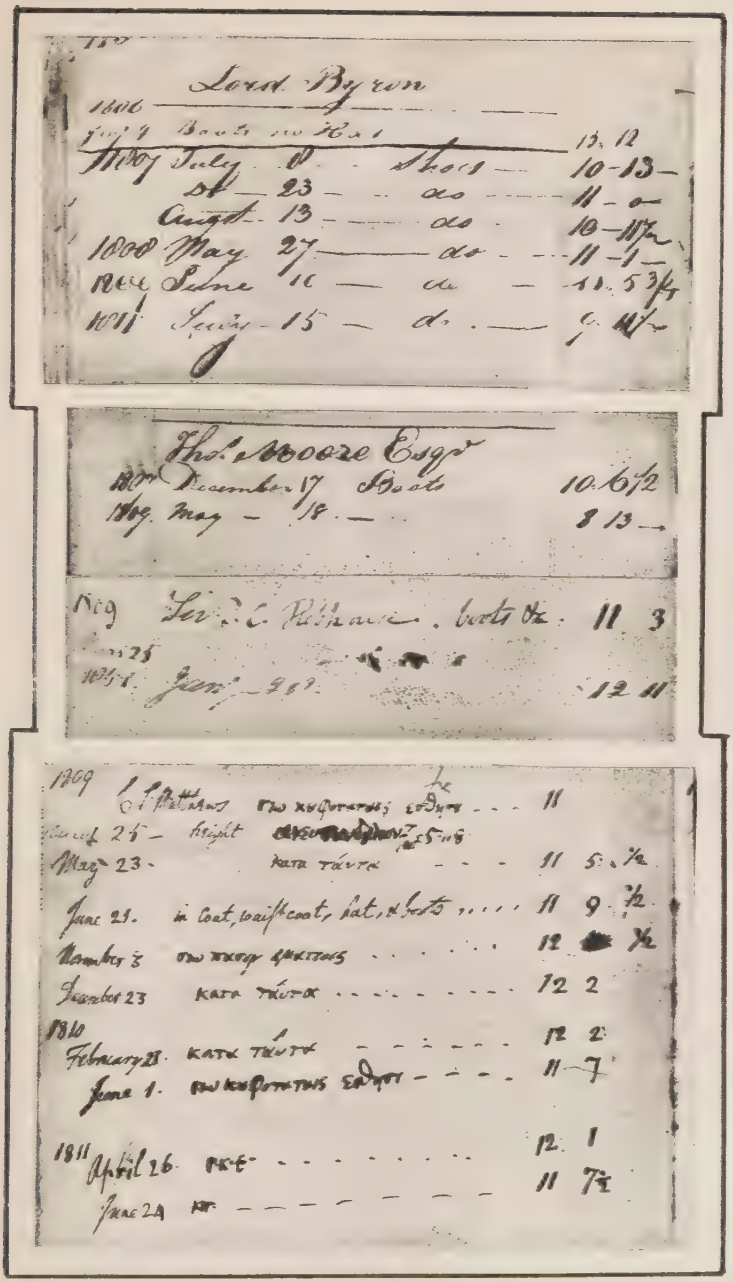
8

The key to our problem is to be found in a phrase from one of the letters to Augusta just mentioned, "My Library is rather extensive and (as you perhaps know), I am a mighty Scribbler." He was, in fact, at work while at Newstead on *The British Bards*, as the poem was then called. The three hundred and eighty lines of October 1807 had grown to nearly six hundred by the time he handed the work on printed sheets to Dallas in January 1809. Already Byron's attitude towards his pursuit of authorship was

taking on the complex character that became more and more evident throughout his life. Byron's poetic activity was enormous; during his working life of sixteen years he published at a rough estimate something not far short of eighty thousand lines of verse, or, to press the argument, an average of fourteen lines a day over the entire time. This is, in mere productivity, nothing less than stupendous.[1] It is useless to maintain that mere volume is of no importance in these matters; volume does relate itself, in spite of our æsthetic theories, to essential energy, and the history of the great artists of the world in every kind confirms this belief. Nor is it more to the point to argue that Byron was in a great deal of his work far from being a scrupulous craftsman; that he was, indeed, very often no more than a facile improviser. It is futile to theorise about these things at a distance. The only sound test is to go back to the work itself; and if we go back to Byron's work in mass we cannot but find that, although there may be but few pages, or stanzas, or lines, of the supreme lordship, there is in it all a vigour and invention wholly beyond the reach of any small talent. With this rich, though it may be generally unaudited, energy, it is unreasonable to suppose that Byron, in his heart, took his creative instincts lightly. He was by nature an ardent man of letters, and if his lot in life had been that of, say, a Leigh Hunt, he would have professed his accomplishments with all the resources at his command. Even as things were, it is clear from many of his letters and from his journals that his preoccupations were with literature and his own abundant gifts. But he was, almost by accident, a nobleman, and a very inexperienced one. By some subtle inhibition, he was never to the end of his life confident that writing was a gentleman's trade. In his reason he knew that the suspicion was nonsensical, but the suspicion persisted. He was haunted by an obscure notion that a peer ought to establish himself in gallantry, and possibly in political or martial action; but he was never sure that this association with publishers and reviewers and the coun-

[1] To compare Byron in this respect with two more of our most prolific poets, Shelley, in a period of thirteen years, produced, at as quick a computation, considerably less than forty thousand lines, and Browning, in nearly sixty years, not much more than a hundred thousand.

PLATE V



EXTRACTS FROM THE WEIGHTS REGISTERS BELONGING TO MESSRS. BERRY BROS. & CO., SHOWING THE RECORDS OF BYRON, MOORE, HOBHOUSE, AND MATTHEWS

ters of bookshops was quite the thing. He liked the *réclame* that successful authorship brought as much as any one; but he always had a troubled reservation in his mind to protest, if necessary, that he was not seriously an author at all—that he did these things as a mere relaxation from the demands of his station. The pretence was an absurd one, and altogether outside the range of his own proper character; but that it all along influenced his behaviour there can be no doubt. Eliminate the letters to Murray and to his other literary connections from his correspondence, and we cannot tell from it that he was anything but an accomplished and rather well instructed man of the world.

It must be remembered that Byron did not come easily into the inheritance either of his rank or of his genius. We have seen how poorly he was helped towards a natural assumption of his title by education and environment, and he was always a little subject to misgivings as to the precise obligations of a lord. There is an absurd but characteristic story of his visiting Constantinople, and being admitted to an audience of ceremony with the Sultan by a privilege extended to visitors at the embassies; he claimed a place of especial distinction in the procession as an English peer, and would not be satisfied until the Austrian Internuncio was called in to confirm the English Ambassador's assurance that, at an official function, the "Turks neither acknowledged the precedence, nor could be requested to consider the distinctions, of our nobility." Towards the end of his life, when he had grown wiser, he told Lady Blessington that he had not been able to form an impartial opinion of Galt when he knew him, finding that he "could not awe him into a respect sufficiently profound for my sublime self, either as a peer or an author." To say in set terms that Byron was a snob would be to vulgarise a character that, with all its uncertainties and misdemeanours, had nothing at least of this vulgarity in it. The essential failure of the snob comes of his rating himself too high because he has no real standards, does not perceive merit and quality in other people by which to measure himself. His tokens are ignorance and insensibility; he has no horizons, and he is unaware of the criterions by which he himself is tried. Of these disabilities Byron was free. Far from being

insensitive, he was desperately, even poignantly, alert to everything admirable in his contacts. Miss Milbanke, Hobhouse, Augusta, Shelley, Tom Moore, his mother even, Murray, poor descanting Dr. Kennedy, the flighty Lady Blessington, the lily-livered Fletcher and Leigh Hunt of inspired penury—he could fall out with all these and a dozen others and abuse them, but he had unerring instinct for the true virtue of every one of them. And so he had for the qualities of the fashionable world of his slighter acquaintance. There was no touch of that confident sufficiency in his arrogance that marks your true snob. He knew distinction often better than it knew itself, and he was always vaguely anxious to justify his own claims in its presence. Anxiety was, indeed, a motive that largely governed his life, which is a vastly different thing from assurance. Immense and memorable as his achievement was, both as a character and a poet, he suffered, as do other men, from a constitutional malady of spirit, and his malady was uncertainty. Nor was it constitutional only. Circumstance conspired with nature to keep him always bewildered between a superbly gifted intelligence and an utterly insecure experience. No such vivid spirit could have come so unprepared upon his turn of fortune and have made a more gallant showing than he; but the fact remains that what might have been supported with unconscious ease was a continual drain upon his energy. A clown may suddenly acquire a coronet without it costing him anything but cash, but a Byron meets the same ordeal only with heavy labour of character. This is true, in spite of our redistributions, to-day; it was even more inevitable a hundred and odd years ago.

This condition, as it were, of the probationer, was his lot as a man of letters no less than as an aristocrat. When he left England for the first time he knew hardly anybody in the society of which he could claim and aspired to be a member, beyond a few Harrow acquaintances. When he returned, after two years, he was the courted favourite of that world for a brief period until his marriage collapsed in scandal, and thereafter for the rest of his life he was, whether by choice or necessity, an exile. And when he left England for the first time he also had no liter-

ary connections of any importance at all. A few provincial amateurs, a promising youth or two of his own age such as Hobhouse, and an industrious second-rater such as Dallas—these were the nearest approaches to genius with which he could match his own. Again, in this respect, after two years of absence he returned to find a welcome from his equals and to make acquaintances that were worth boasting; but again he was forced or chose to discard them after a short intimacy, with no more than a casual word to remind him of them for the rest of his life. Apart from his few meteoric days in literary London, Shelley was the only man of his own stature whom he ever knew with more than bare formality, and among smaller but considerable talents Moore and Leigh Hunt were alone his familiars. These things have to be weighed carefully in considering Byron's life. It is one thing for a poet and a figure in the world to retire from the stress and tumult full of years and ripe in achievement; or to seclude himself from the distractions of a society with which he can regain touch at his will; it is quite another thing for such a one to be bereft by circumstances of any chance of general communion with his own kind when he may want it. Byron to-day is one of the most admired—in Shakespeare's word—of men; while he lived he was one of the most lonely.

There was thus little in the ordering of Byron's life likely to tranquillise a spirit naturally restive, or to humanise affections that, while they could be tender and fearless, had also in them a streak of ferocity that needed a governing influence which was never found.[1] His early misery—for it was no less—at home, his brush with the *Edinburgh*, Lord Carlisle's neglect, the sudden violence of his fame, the waywardness of his finances, his marriage, his exile, the vagrancy of his life in Italy, step by step the disintegrating process went forward. It is only partly true to say that these things were the consequences of his own character. Byron would, no doubt, have been a difficult person to himself and his friends in any case; but there was nothing in his nature that made it inevitable that he should have a demoralising mother, inherit a great but heavily embarrassed estate, be slighted

[1] The Guiccioli—for a time? Perhaps.

by the one powerful connection that he had, marry the most perfectly ineligible woman that could have been chosen, and part from her in circumstances of almost unexampled confusion. Byron was not the man to better bad luck, but that bad luck came very unhandsomely his way must be allowed. The result was to leave him always in some degree baffled in his relations to life. It is true that every man, and particularly every poet, goes darkly through his days; but few have been called upon to stumble so fitfully as Byron. Wordsworth's early life, for example, was not wholly unadventurous, and spiritually he endured and laboured as heavily as any man; but Byron knew nothing of the serene ardours of speculation that were to Wordsworth a light and a redemption. Blake, again, suffered as even Byron can hardly have done, but Byron never saw God on Primrose Hill. Such serenity as was Byron's came in no better shape than a disillusioned worldly wisdom; the deeper discords of his soul were unresolved to the end, and he found only a frustrated promise of escape at Missolonghi. And his torment was not a purification, but a betrayal. He allowed it to bait him into conduct that censure would not admit was unworthy of him. We know better than that, and so did he, but it is painful to remember. The conflict within him, the conflict that in fact was Byron, made him dangerously moody, cryptic, thin-skinned almost in a physical sense, and sometimes inconsiderate to the point of cruelty.

This somewhat sinister harshness, it has to be recognised, displayed itself not only at crises when there was something to account for if not to excuse it, as there was, for example, when he behaved disgracefully in the Piccadilly house before the birth of his daughter Ada. His friends learnt to accept it, without approval, as a defect that would from time to time assert itself in an otherwise amiable and very attractive character. Chance acquaintances might hit or miss it as luck befell them; they were perhaps more likely than not to hit it, and especially if they were women. Dr. Polidori, the medical man who travelled with Byron when he went from England for the second and last time, left a diary which was destroyed, an expurgated version only being

published. But a very eminent man of letters[1] who read the manuscript in his youth tells me that it spoke freely not only of Byron's occasional amours, but of the extraordinary lack of natural tenderness with which he was apt to conduct them. The morals of these matters in Byron's time were notoriously free, and Byron himself was certainly no example to his age. It is plain that very few people, chaste or libertine, ever speak the truth of themselves in these things; but Byron at least had no scruples about doing that. To be shocked at Byron's philanderings is not within the scope of this study, but to regret that he could sometimes behave in them like a barbarian, is. The score between him and the women who entered largely into his life, his mother, Augusta, his wife, Lady Oxford, Lady Caroline Lamb, Lady Frances Webster, Clare Clairmont, and the Countess Guiccioli, is on the whole a fairly even one. But in his affairs of the chambermaid variety there is reason to believe that he allowed the undisciplined side of his nature to show itself at its worst, and the crudity is symptomatic of the most unpleasing feature of his character. Charming, generous, brave, unexpectedly tolerant, susceptible to the least kindness, a real crusader against tyranny, fate yet willed it that there should be in him just one strain of loutishness that was too often out of control.

When we come to assess the whole matter, however, the wonder is that he came through his ordeal with so much native goodness intact. His poetry, that remarkable volume representing, as we have suggested, by far the greater part of his time and energy, is mainly the creation of the mood of worldly wisdom that was his only complete discovery. But it is none the less a mighty achievement. The divinely rewarded guesses at truth of a Blake, a Wordsworth or a Shelley, were not his concern, nor were the moonlit magic of a Coleridge or the enchanted lucidity of a Keats. It was his, however, to shape no less urgently than they his own vision, for what it was worth, into verse, with unremitting power. To have done that is in itself a major virtue, and would leave us with little right to be censorious; least of all should Byron be impeached by those who have themselves an in-

[1] Sir Edmund Gosse, who allows me to give his name.

curable talent for doing nothing. When we add to this in Byron's favour the many graces that he kept unimpaired through all his disasters, we cannot but delight in a character that, having to account for so much of error, comes through at the end so rich and unshaken still. It was not for nothing that Hobhouse, on hearing of Byron's death, wrote in his journal, "No man ever lived who had such devoted friends. His power of attaching those about him to his person was such as no one I ever knew possessed."

Such, then, was the man now, at the age of twenty-one, in the making. In some respects advanced beyond his years, in others he was as yet but a hobbledehoy of life. England at the moment was not very attractive to him, and he wanted to get away from it. His relations with his mother got no better, and a foreign tour would save repeated explanations of his absence from her society. Before returning to London in January 1809 he had seen Mary Chaworth again, now married and a mother, and the meeting did nothing to compose him. His first book had been pilloried by the leading journal of the day, and although he was about to show that he had plenty to say about that, he could not feel that he had established any footing in literary London. His entry into the House of Lords had been a dismal and unpromising business, and any little attraction that the patronage of Lord Carlisle might have had for him was at an end. Moreover, Dallas says that this grievance also caused for the time an estrangement from Augusta, who was living under Carlisle's hospitality. However this may have been, we have no letter from Byron to his sister between December 1808 and August 1811,[1] and no mention of her in his correspondence during that time beyond a reference in a letter to his mother written from Constantinople in June 1810: "Though I was happy to obtain my seat without the assistance of Lord Carlisle, I had no measures to keep with a man who declined interfering as my relation on that occasion, and I have done with him, though I regret distressing Mrs. Leigh, poor thing! I hope she is happy." Altogether, therefore,

1 Hobhouse, in his *Westminster Review* notice of Dallas, speaks of Augusta and Byron having met and corresponded in the spring of 1809.

he had little reason to wish to do anything but see his satire published and be off.

9

English Bards and Scotch Reviewers appeared anonymously, and Byron retired again to Newstead, determined to leave England as soon as possible. In the middle of April Dallas reports progress, saying that sales are good, that the poem is highly spoken of privately and in the early notices, and that in spite of their precautions Byron is already generally known to be the author. This success brought the poet back to London to make preparations for a new edition, and within a fortnight, says Dallas, he had written nearly four hundred new lines. He also decided to acknowledge his authorship in the new edition, and wrote a prose postcript, which Dallas tried unsuccessfully to dissuade him from printing. In it he explains that he is going abroad, but, in case it should be thought by any one that this is to escape the attentions of those whom he has censured, he will be back later and ready to meet any demands made upon him. He adds that, although the poem has been in the first place published anonymously, he has made no attempt to conceal his name, which has been commonly associated with the work, and that he has in fact been expecting "sundry cartels" that have not come. Dallas was right in urging that the work gained nothing by this rather childish and querulous addition.

When the poem appeared in its second edition in October, it had taken, with all but slight modifications, its final form. It placed Byron in the small class of elect English satirists; in making this very considerable allowance for a poet of twenty-one, it is not necessary to claim that it gave him a very high place in that class. It has great spirit throughout, very few *longueurs*, and it is not unduly cramped by obscure allusions. In actual literary skill, of which we have seen some indications in *Hours of Idleness*, Byron had made an immense advance from that book. Already he is at intervals achieving strokes worthy of the masters on whom he is modelling himself.

'Tis pleasant, sure, to see one's name in print;
A Book's a Book, altho' there's nothing in't. . . .

and:

A man must serve his time to every trade
Save Censure—Critics all are ready made.
Take hackneyed jokes from Miller, got by rote,
With just enough of learning to misquote. . . .

and:

As soon
Seek roses in December—ice in June;
Hope constancy in wind, or corn in chaff,
Believe a woman or an epitaph,
Or any other thing that's false. . . .

and:

Well might triumphant Genii bear thee hence,
Illustrious conqueror of common sense!

Such lines as these announce a disciple whom Dryden and Pope would have been proud to acknowledge. The poem also has an intellectual candour that was always to be one of Byron's happiest gifts. In attacking the fashionable follies and extravagances that he saw as a youth in London, he was aware that his own conduct was far from scrupulous in such matters, and he makes his apology in a passage that may be given as evidence of his good faith with himself and as an attractive example of the general style of the poem:

E'en I—least thinking of a thoughtless throng,
Just skilled to know the right and choose the wrong,
Bred at that age when Reason's shield is lost,
To fight my course through Passion's countless host,[1]
Whom every path of Pleasure's flow'ry way
Has lured in turn, and all have led astray—
E'en I must raise my voice, e'en I must feel
Such scenes, such men, destroy the public weal:
Altho' some kind, censorious friend will say,
"What art thou better, meddling fool, than they?"

1 Seven years later Byron noted, "Yes: and a precious chase they led me."

And every Brother Rake will smile to see
That miracle, a Moralist in me.
No matter—when some Bard in virtue strong,
Gifford, perchance, shall raise the chastening song,
Then sleep my pen for ever! and my voice
Be only heard to hail him, and rejoice,
Rejoice, and yield my feeble praise, though I
May feel the lash that Virtue must apply.

The chief fault of the poem, however, is one that keeps it to a humble place in its own high company. Satire is, rightly, no respecter of persons; but we need to have some confidence in the satirist's judgment before admitting his right of censure. It is not enough to say silly things cleverly; the wit must be founded on good sense. If eminent talents are to be attacked, it must be for their qualifying defects, and not in general terms. In other words, it is well that satire should be high-tempered, but it will not do for it to be wrong-headed, and in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* Byron is wrong-headed repeatedly. No plea of ignorance could excuse a poet, however young, for dismissing Wordsworth in 1808 as a tedious and vulgar imbecile, Lamb as an ignoble follower of Southey, Coleridge as a braying half-wit, and Burns as the inferior of Gifford, while awarding enthusiastic bays not only to Campbell and Rogers, which was well enough, but to such masters as Macneil, Shee, Sotheby, Wright, and Richards. Byron lived to repent these follies of offence at least. Indeed, he came to regret the satire as a whole, and, causing it to be suppressed in 1811, authorised no further edition during his life-time. It was, properly, reincorporated in his works after his death, and it remains, with all its errors of taste and understanding, a great poet's first triumph.

Before the revised edition of the poem appeared in October 1809, Byron had gone abroad. By the end of May the work was ready for press, and he returned to Newstead, where he remained for a few weeks, putting his affairs into such order as he could. On July 2nd, with a suite of three servants, and Hobhouse as his companion, he sailed from Falmouth for Lisbon, and it was two years before he saw England again.

Chapter III

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

(1809-1816)

"The public, with its usual justice, chastised him for its own folly."
—MACAULAY.

1

BYRON'S first foreign tour, as we have it in the records, is an interlude between presage and storm. It was a time of adventure lived in a straight line, directly out of his own nature, and not confused by social or literary intrigues. Before he set out upon it he was, as we have seen, distracted in an environment that his genius transcended, but in which his *savoir faire* left him often impotent. When he returned it was to become a figure first of dazzling privilege, and then, after a fevered enjoyment of this eminence, one—as he chose to make it—of irreparable scandal. The intervening two years were the most equable of his life, the least involved in conflict, and spent more than any others in unvexed observation.

Hobhouse accompanied Byron during the first year only of his travels, and has left a closely detailed record of their journey in two handsome quarto volumes,[1] adorned with a series of charming coloured aquatints. Whoever wishes to trace Byron's first pilgrimage step by step may do so by the aid of this account, from which a summarised itinerary is prefixed by Mr. E. H. Coleridge to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in the definitive edition of the *Works*. It is nothing to our purpose to follow Byron's progress in this way, and it is not surprising to find that a

1 *A Journey through Albania and Other Provinces of Turkey in Europe and Asia to Constantinople During the Years* 1809 *and* 1810. By J. C. Hobhouse. Two volumes. London: Cawthorn, 1813.

great part of Hobhouse's twelve hundred pages is heavy with geographical and excursionist dullness. He has, however, some admirable passages that help us to realise the conditions in which the journey was made, and he records a few striking incidents. It may be remarked, in passing, that he achieves the somewhat remarkable feat of mentioning Byron by name only four times throughout the narrative; he rarely makes any direct reference to the poet at all, and when he does it is as "my Friend." We have also some graphic pages from Galt, who fell in with the travellers on the outward voyage at Gibraltar, and spent about three weeks with them on the way to and at Malta, renewing the acquaintance in the following spring at Athens. Byron's own account of his two years' absence from England is to be found in some thirty letters, two-thirds of which were written to his mother, and in the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. From these sources we can learn all that we need to know of Byron's only springtime.

The first twelve months were spent in a continual moving from place to place, a matter of no small labour in those days. In three months of the autumn of 1809 Byron and Hobhouse slept in some thirty different towns or villages of Greece and Albania. The difficulties attending these peregrinations are well indicated by Hobhouse:

> Our baggage was weighty. . . . Besides four large leathern trunks, weighing about eighty pounds when full, and three smaller trunks, we had a canteen, which is quite indispensable; three beds, with bedding, and two light wooden bedsteads. These latter articles [are] very recommendable . . . preserving you from vermin, and the damp of mud-floors . . . all the baggage is carried on horses. . . .
>
> Our horses were very small and lean (he says on another occasion) apparently just caught from grass, and had no shoes —two of them being in milk, and followed by their foals. . . . Having crossed the marsh, we came into a green plain of some extent, covered in part with brushwood, and in many places so swampy, that the baggage horses fell down repeatedly. . . . (And again, of a morning departure): These difficulties occurred every day of our travels, and we were never less than two hours getting under way.

Accommodation was as uncertain as transit. At one inn they found that their room, twenty feet by ten, in which they had to dispose of their own party of seven, was to be shared with four Albanian Turks and a priest. At another time, "after stumbling through several narrow lanes" in a blinding storm they came, says Hobhouse, to "the miserable hovel prepared for our reception. The room was half full of maize in the stalk; the floor was of mud, and there was no outlet for the smoke but through the door." On this occasion Byron was derelict in the storm with a detachment of the party. The guides lost their heads and stampeded, the dragoman lost his and fired off both his pistols at once, whereupon Fletcher, Byron's valet, lost his, and screamed out that they were attacked by robbers. They were exposed to a furious night and some danger for nine hours, scaring Hobhouse by not turning up till three in the morning. This was not twentieth-century caravanning in the wilds of Hertfordshire, but a characteristic incident in a solid twelve months of roughing it in a remote and treacherous country. Byron had plenty of courage, and he was always ambitious for action, and these days, although they had no spectacular purpose, must have been after his own heart.

Leaving Lisbon in the middle of July, the travellers proceeded to ride post nearly five hundred miles across Portugal and Spain to Cadiz, and thence took boat to Gibraltar. One day in August, John Galt, who was afterwards to become the author of *Annals of the Parish* (1821), and one of Byron's biographers, was sitting in the garrison library at Gibraltar. Thirty years of age, he was convalescing in the south of Europe, and on this day was kept indoors by the heat—it was, he says, "exceedingly sultry. The air was sickly, and, if the wind was not a sirocco, it was a withering levanter." Gibraltar in August is, indeed, as he says, "oppressive to the functions of life." Into the shaded glare of the library came a young man who seated himself opposite the invalid at the table. He was dressed as a Londoner of fashion, simply but with a note of modish elegance. He had an engaging and intellectual countenance, which, however, clouded from time to time, almost forbiddingly so, as though at some dis-

pleasing recollection. Galt thought he knew the face, but the stranger left the library without speaking, and it was not until dinner at night that Galt heard from his host that Lord Byron and Mr. Hobhouse were in the town, and realised who his silent companion had been. As Galt himself notes, Byron, scarcely twenty-two years old, was at the time known only by the attack in the *Edinburgh* and the quite recent success of his satire; but his power of exciting attention without apparent effort was already marked, and Galt felt it. There is a little flutter in Galt's style as he records the meeting. "I thought his face not unknown to me; I began to conjecture where I could have seen him; and, after an unobserved scrutiny, to speculate both as to his character and vocation." Then, when he has learnt who it is, "Hobhouse had, some short time before I left London, published certain translations and poems rather respectable in their way, and I had seen the work, so that his name was not altogether strange to me. Byron's was familiar—*The Edinburgh Review* had made it so, and still more the satire of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, but I was not conscious of having seen the persons of either." The next evening Galt embarked for Malta, and found that Byron was on the same boat. He cannot help watching him; he observes what he takes to be an aristocratic affectation in the young poet as he comes aboard in the little bustle of his party and their luggage, in his aloofness from the other passengers as twilight falls on the great rock above them, in the petulance with which he speaks to his valet, Fletcher. Altogether Galt at first is rather nettled; he does not much like this poetic-looking young nobleman who is giving himself airs, but he still cannot help watching him, and wondering about him.

After three days of it, Galt decided that Hobhouse was much the better fellow of the two companions, and that Byron's head had been quite unwarrantably turned. Then Byron relented, came out of his provokingly distant mood, joined in the amenities of the ship, and Galt was at once enchanted. After shooting at bottles, catching turtles, and paying coast calls together for another three or four days, Galt came to the conclusion that he had formed one of the three most agreeable acquaintances of his

life. Byron responded cordially enough, and Galt at least was unaware of the constraint that was to be recounted to Lady Blessington years later.

Galt was, in fact, almost as touchy about Byron's rank as the poet was himself. The least self-assertion on Byron's part, and Galt pulls him up at once, in his notes. The party is taken to the theatre at Cagliari by the Ambassador, the Italian Royal Family being present. Byron is given some preferential treatment about a box, and Galt just manages to conceal his vexation. But, on leaving, Byron thanks the minister for this and other courtesies, and Galt squares the account by observing that it was "with more elocution than was precisely requisite. The style and formality amused Mr. Hobhouse, as well as others." But Galt had not quite the courage of his not very serious malice, for Byron, upon being rallied on the matter by Hobhouse as they were walking home, took a huff and fell back with Galt from the others. Galt proceeds: "Byron, on account of his lameness, and the roughness of the pavement, took hold of my arm, appealing to me if he could have said less, after the kind and hospitable treatment we had all received. Of course, though I felt pretty much as Mr. Hobhouse did, I could not do otherwise than civilly assent, especially as his Lordship's comfort, at the moment, seemed in some degree dependent on being confirmed in the good opinion he was desirous to entertain of his own courtesy. From that night I evidently rose in his good graces." Galt, however, further notes that "his uncertain temper made his favour precarious," and one wonders whether he and some of the rest of them, when they were temporising with their intimacies in this way, ever suspected how shrewd Byron's discrimination was. On arriving at Malta, Galt tells us in the same vein, all the passengers hurried ashore with the exception of Hobhouse and Byron. The latter had sent a message to the governor announcing his arrival, and remained aboard in expectation of a salute from the batteries. This was not forthcoming, and Byron was obliged to "slip into the city unnoticed and unknown." This was very amusing, and Galt was duly amused.

In Seville Byron had exchanged locks of hair with a Spanish

beauty, Donna Josepha, in whose house he lodged. That is to say, she cut off a lock of his and gave him one of her own, having first taunted him with what she conceived to be an impossible loyalty to some English lover because he declined her own invitation to share her apartment—an advance that for once seems almost seriously to have embarrassed Byron. In Cadiz he was captivated by the pretty daughter of an admiral, and was progressing very well in his suit with the aid of a dictionary until she asked as a token for a ring that he had a fancy to keep, upon which both lovers fell into a temper and parted. In Malta he met Mrs. Spencer Smith, a lady whose history resembles a romance by Dumas. "Since my arrival here," he writes to his mother, "I have had scarcely any other companion." He fell, or according to Galt affected to fall, in love with her, divided his time between her society and lessons in Arabic, and nearly had to fight a duel with an officer on her account. He made her the Florence of *Childe Harold:*

> Sweet Florence! could another ever share
> This wayward, loveless heart, it would be thine. . . .

But, he continues with assurance:

> Fair Florence found, in sooth with some amaze,
> One who, 'twas said, still sighed to all he saw,
> Withstand, unmoved, the lustre of her gaze,
> Which others hailed with real or mimic awe,
> Their hope, their doom, their punishment, their law;
> All that Gay Beauty from her bondsmen claims:
> And much she marvelled that a youth so raw
> Nor felt, nor feigned at least, the oft-told flames,
> Which though sometimes they frown, yet rarely anger dames.

Mrs. Spencer Smith, however, went away with the yellow diamond ring that he had kept against the blandishments of Cadiz.

At Malta Galt was relieved of his anxiety, and went off on his own affairs. Byron and Hobhouse left a fortnight afterwards, and a week later, on September 26th, Hobhouse notes, naturally without any sense of fatality in his words, "Before sun-

set we had a distant view of a town called Messalonge." Thence the two friends set out upon their Albanian adventure, to encounter such conditions as have been remarked. They saw new policies in ferment and inspected ancient ruins, and learnt a great deal about romance and vermin. They saw Actium, near which, in Byron's words, Antony lost the world; they were nearly wrecked—"Fletcher yelled after his wife, the Greeks called on all the saints, the Musselmans on Alla; the Captain burst into tears and ran below deck, telling us to call on God" [1]—and they found an Albanian chief who, on being offered payment for his attentions, said, "No, I wish you to love me, not to pay me." Their privations did not extend to sustenance, and they were well provided with coffee, tobacco, and snuff, with a plentiful supply of fowls and eggs, olives and grapes, and the precarious resinated wine that is still an enigma to strangers, while Hobhouse records such epicurean fare as "a dish of chopped mutton, rolled up with rice highly seasoned, called *ypraik*, and a large thin pasty of fowl, or spinach sprinkled with sugar; both of which are very commendable." The sherbet, however, "is but a very poor liquor, being only sweet water sometimes coloured with marygold flowers, and a few blanched almonds swimming on the top of it." All was discovery to the travellers, but at this distance one day differs little in interest from another, and we need only pause for a few moments upon the most decorative episode of the journey, the visit to Ali Pasha.

Ali was at this time probably the most picturesque scoundrel in Europe. Scoundrelism was, however, the normal ethic of the near orient at least, and he was eminent merely by being more successful in craft and cruelty than his competitors. In his supremacy he behaved to such visitors as our Orestes and Pylades, as Galt calls them, with a magnificence of hospitality to which Byron, for all his sense of character and nose for a tyrant, was readily susceptible. To define this chieftain's position would be to analyse an obscure and now forgotten region of European history, and it will suffice to say that he was in effect a robber king who was nominally under the dominion of the Ottoman empire,

[1] Byron to his mother.

but who actually established himself by organising his rival bandits out of existence, and kept himself with admirable cunning beyond the mercies of Constantinople. His character is exemplified in a single anecdote. Byron's aide-de-camp, provided by Ali himself, who had in his youth seen the pasha as a petty marauder with his jacket out at elbows, was asked how it was that the now autocratic ruler seemed to know him so well. He replied that he had seen the time when he had, with the men of his village, descended upon the rising freebooter and broken his windows with shot. "And what," he was asked, as Hobhouse tells us, "did Ali do with the men of your village?" And the answer, which Homer might have stolen, came, "Nothing at all; he made friends with our chief man, persuaded him to come to Tepellenè, and there roasted him on a spit; after which we submitted."

Ali welcomed Byron and Hobhouse with all the honours of state. He even allowed himself to be discovered standing to receive them, a mark of unusual favour. He was now sixty years of age, stricken by an incurable disease, and in the full exercise of his Decameronic powers. His son's wife, whom he liked, had complained that her husband was paying attentions to other women. On being asked to name her supposed rivals she gave a list of fifteen Greek and Turkish beauties, who were seized on the same night, carried out on to a lake in boats, tied in sacks, and thrown into the water. This, Hobhouse reminds us, was a reflection upon Turkish manners in general rather than an instance of peculiar ferocity in Ali. Indeed, the same expedient served when the pasha found that the expenses of his seraglio were becoming too high. His prescribed limit, registered by himself, seems to have been three hundred ladies, and when sometimes by carelessness this number was exceeded, economy was demanded.

When Byron, "in a full suit of staff uniform, with a very magnificent sabre," and Hobhouse entered into the presence, they found a fat little man, five feet five inches high, with blue eyes, and a long white beard that would have been the envy of another Turk. Being, however, with monarchical grace, less interested in this distinction than in his guests, he neither smelt nor stroked it

to excess. He received them in a handsome room, with a marble fountain and cistern, ornamented with Dutch tiles. He was dressed without ostentation, making his effect with a turban of fine gold muslin and a dagger studded with brilliants. He informed his visitors that he looked upon them as his children, and showed them a mountain howitzer and an English telescope, through which latter he pointed out to them a horseman who was, he said, an enemy who was deserting to him. But, though he made no mention of the spit, we have fears for the stranger, since Ali asked his interpreter "with a smile," to convey this information. So genial, indeed, was he in dispensing his courtesies that he laughed aloud on several occasions—a cordiality of which Hobhouse says that he never met with another example in the country. He asked if he had ever been heard of in England, and was entranced to learn that he had. Also he showed them a rifle that had been given to him by Napoleon, inlaid with silver and diamonds, which, however, the guests were privately assured by the secretary, the pasha had added himself to make the gift more impressive. "Buonaparte," says Byron in a letter, had further "sent him a snuff-box with his picture. He said the snuff-box was very well, but the picture he could excuse, as he neither liked it nor the original." Ali made a great success with Byron by complimenting him upon the marks of breeding to be observed in his hands and ears, an attention to which the poet refers, with becoming indifference, several times in his letters.

Ali's patronage, for all its operatic nature, had very practical advantages. It conducted his guests through a robber-ridden land in safety, with his passport and an escort of Albanian soldiers. On leaving Janina, Ali's capital, "after settling accounts with the great officers of the palace," as Hobhouse tells us, "all of whom, from the Chamberlain to the Fool, came for a present," the travellers set off towards Athens at the end of October. A month later, they reached Missolonghi, staying there for two days, and dismissed their Albanians before leaving by boat for Patras. Byron having sent two of his servants back to England from Gibraltar, one because he was too old, and the other because he was too young, to face the rest of the

journey, Fletcher was now the only Englishman in his service. Fletcher was devoted enough to Byron, but both the poet and Hobhouse complain that English servants were a "perpetual source of blunders, quarrels and delays" in difficult country, requiring better accommodation than their masters and complaining on any provocation. "Fletcher," writes Byron to his mother, "is very much disgusted with his fatigues, though he has undergone nothing that I have not shared. He is a poor creature." It was, however, Byron's fancy that had taken them on this Albanian goose-chase, not Fletcher's. The dejected valet was also having some trouble with his eyes; but Byron was not sure whether it was from lightning or crying.

At Patras they found that the only tailor who could make Frankish clothes was out of town, and that they could not get other necessary supplies. Byron and Hobhouse thence went on through Delphi, where they took ceremonial draughts of the Castalian fount, and Thebes to the village of Scourta, which they reached on Christmas Eve. Here they seasonably spent the night, much to Fletcher's chagrin we may be sure, above the mangers of a stable occupied by cows and pigs. At half-past eight in the evening of Christmas Day they entered Athens.

Here they spent ten weeks, there not being a day of which they did not, in Hobhouse's words, "devote a part to the contemplation of the noble monuments of Grecian genius, that have outlasted the ravages of time and the outrage of barbarous and," with a shot at Lord Elgin, who was then at the height of his notoriety, "antiquarian despoilers." Athens had by this time become a fashionable resort for travellers, and Hobhouse learnt that the town was even shortly to be provided with a tavern. The two friends took lodgings in adjoining houses, separated only by a thin wall through which they cut a doorway. Byron's hostess was a Greek lady named Theodora Macri, the mother of three daughters, one of whom was to achieve a romantic immortality as the Maid of Athens. Byron tells Henry Drury that he is "dying for love of three Greek girls at Athens, sisters . . . Teresa, Mariana, and Katinka . . . all of them under fifteen," and he is similarly impartial in a letter to Hodgson.

Teresa was, however, the inspiration of the song which, like so much of Byron's work, has become a commonplace of English poetry in defiance of critical distempers. Galt describes her as "a pale and pensive-looking girl, with regular Grecian features," but as having been "rendered more famous by his Lordship's verses than her degree of beauty deserved." Another visitor to Athens, Hugh William Williams, known as "Grecian Williams" and an admirable water-colour artist, concludes a much more rhapsodical account of the sisters on a lyrical note: "Though so poor, their virtue shines as conspicuously as their beauty. Not all the wealth of the East, or the complimentary lays even of the first of England's poets, could render them so truly worthy of love and admiration." In any case, Teresa was a precocious fifteen, with spirit and a witty turn of speech, and no doubt quite enough good looks to make her an amusing companion for Byron, and we need hardly speculate with Galt as to whether "he really cherished any sincere attachment to her." The Maid of Athens may safely be allowed as a concession to the idyllists of Byronic tradition. She lived until 1875.

From Athens the travellers made excursions to Marathon and elsewhere, exploring the country with great zeal, finding here an ancient monument marked with Lord Elgin's label of appropriation, there a subterranean cave from which they nearly contrived to lose the way out, and keeping Fletcher on the jump with wolves and centipedes. At one place they found a Turk who, having been offered a considerable sum for a Greek statue that he had dug up in his garden, shattered it in search of the treasure that he was convinced it must contain. Byron, alert as he was to the poetry and imaginative spell of Greece, had little interest in Hobhouse's archæological studies; but he was an excellent travelling companion, "who, to quickness of observation and ingenuity of remark, united that gay good humour which keeps alive the attention under pressure of fatigue, and softens the aspect of every difficulty and danger." There is, when we remember the conditions in which their year together was passed, a good deal of significant character in Hobhouse's words.

Early in March they set out for Constantinople. Galt saw a

little of them again about this time, but seems to have had fewer successful moments with Byron than before. He found him, he thought, less cordial towards Hobhouse, and generally "more of a Captain Grand than improved his manners." Galt, at this time, had commercial aspirations in the East, which, we conjecture, may have left Byron uninterested, while, as for Hobhouse, the two friends had now been constantly together for nine months, and, in spite of Hobhouse's testimony, we recall Byron's observation about ipecacuanha. The spring and early summer were spent in Constantinople, Smyrna, and other parts of Turkey, and the journey calls for as little comment in detail as that through Albania. In April Byron made his first attempt to swim the Hellespont from Sestos to Abydos in emulation of Leander. Accompanied by a naval officer named Ekenhead, and attended by Hobhouse and others in a boat, he started the passage early in the evening, but the current and temperature forced the swimmers to return to the boat after having been an hour in the water. On May 3rd, at 10 o'clock in the morning, the attempt was renewed, and this time with success, Byron taking an hour and ten minutes, and Ekenhead five minutes less. Whatever Captain Webb or Mr. Burgess might say of this exploit, Byron was always enormously proud of it. There is something peculiarly unsaturnine in the simplicity with which he recurs to the subject in his letters. Within a year or so of the event he had in his correspondence told Hanson of it once, Dallas twice, Henry Drury and Hodgson three times each, and his mother five times. Vanity about an unimportant thing well done is always engaging.

In Constantinople, where Byron could be seen about the town in a scarlet and gold coat with heavy epaulettes and a feathered cocked-hat, the friends were admitted to an audience of Sultan Mahmoud. The ceremony seems to have been a confused one, with the sovereign's oriental calm alone unruffled. The English Ambassador's party, of which Byron was one, was at first left and forgotten in an outlying shed. After a time they were retrieved, and entered the crowded and dazzling throne-room, each one in charge of a powerful guard. "My attendant," says Hobhouse, "was one of the white Eunuchs . . . [who] pushed

me quickly forwards within ten paces of the throne, where he held me somewhat strictly by the right arm during the audience. He had not forgotten the assassination of Amurath . . . on returning [he] hurried me briskly along, and dismissed me with a gentle push down the step of the ante-chamber." If Byron, after his rebuff about precedence, was also attended by a white eunuch, it must have been a very trying day for his patience.

In July 1810 Hobhouse returned to England, and Byron to Athens, which place he tells his mother he prefers to any that he has seen. He wrote to Hobhouse to tell him what a delightful companion he had become now that he had gone, and the "timberhead Fletcher, who had contrived to ram his damned clumsy foot into a boiling tea-kettle" and had become merely an encumbrance, he sent back home. In Athens, Byron made his headquarters at a Franciscan convent, not returning to the Macris, and during the coming autumn and winter spent his time between Athens and Patras. In October he was confined to bed for five days with a fever, the symptoms of which, as Moore tells us, much resembled those of his last illness. He fought the doctors, but, in spite of his teeth and tongue, in three days they "vomited and glystered me to the last gasp." Moore says that Byron after his illness told Lord Sligo, a new acquaintance of this period, that he should like to die of a consumption, because then all the women would say, "See that poor Byron—how interesting he looks in dying." This is all very well, even when Moore sees in it, rather unnecessarily, some obsession in Byron with his own beauty; but when he tells another story of Byron, on board ship, picking up a Turkish dagger and being heard to say in an undertone, "I should like to know how it feels after committing a murder," and observes on the occasion, "In this startling speech we may detect, I think, the germ of his future Giaours and Laras. This intense *wish* to explore the dark workings of the passions was what . . . at length generated the power; and the faculty which entitled him afterwards to be so truly styled 'the searcher of dark bosoms' may be traced to, perhaps, its earliest stirrings in the sort of feelings that produced these words," we know that he is talking nonsense. The Giaours and

the Laras were the creations of Byron's mind most directly sprung from the consciousness of an audience, and it is odds on Byron knowing that he was overheard when he made his melodramatic little address to the dagger. If he did not, the incident is still of no kind of significance, and it is symptomatic of the hysterical way in which even sober people sometimes insisted in regarding Byron that Moore should have spoken thus, and that Galt in referring to the same event should say, "This dagger-scene must be regarded as both impressive and solemn." There were some dark and obscure things in Byron, but they do not reveal themselves to this little Cambyses' vein.

Byron was enjoying himself abroad, though we know little of the later movements in his travels. In 1814 he notes in his journal that Hobhouse told him, in speaking of a report that connected him with his own *Corsair*, that "part of my travels are supposed to have passed in privacy. Um!—people sometimes hit near the truth; but never the whole truth. H. don't know what I was about the year after he left the Levant; nor does any one—nor—nor—nor—however, it is a lie. . . ." But though enjoying himself, he was getting restless. Not, indeed, for England; far from it. In November 1809 he writes to Hanson: "I will never revisit England again if I can avoid it . . . it is no country for me," and again, in the same letter, "I never will live in England if I can avoid it. *Why*—must remain a secret, but the farther I proceed the less I regret quitting it." But he may have to return to face the consequences of his satire, and in any event Hanson knows that no motive of personal fear could induce him to this resolution to stay away. To Dallas in June 1810 he writes: "I would be a citizen of the world, but I fear some indispensable affairs will soon call me back, and, as I left the land without regret, I shall return without pleasure." The affairs were financial. Hanson was being tiresome, and Byron wrote repeatedly complaining that he could get no satisfaction from him. When he has been away fifteen months, he says: "I have not been favoured with the slightest intimation from you. . . . I wish to suppose anything rather than that you are negligent and uncivil." He several times states his de-

termination not to sell Newstead, whatever happens, until at the end of February 1811 we have a change of mood in: "One thing is certain; if I should ever be induced to sell N. I will pass my life abroad. If I retain it, I return; if not, I stay where I am." A few weeks after this he had told his mother that he might "steer homeward in spring."

It has already been pointed out that Byron's chief correspondent during his absence was his mother. His letters to her show plainly that he thought a good deal better of her at a distance than he did in her company. They are written uniformly in terms of respect. Sometimes it is "Dear Mother," or "My dear Mother," sometimes "Dear Madam," but he sends her his racy accounts of his travels with genial intimacy and a good deal of affection. Although the letters contain little more than these memoranda, we should not suspect from them that the relations between mother and son had ever been anything but the happiest. Only very occasionally does he adopt a tone somewhat of Johnson dismissing Boswell, as in, "Nobody but yourself asks me about my creed—what I am, am not, etc., etc. If I were to begin *explaining*, God knows where I should leave off; so we will say no more about that, if you please." For the rest, the letters are all that the most exacting filial standard could require.

2

At length attention to the affairs became imperative, and letters of June and July, 1811, dated from "*Volage* frigate, at sea," announce to his mother and others that he is homeward bound. On July 17th he is off Ushant, and on the 23rd he writes from Reddish's Hotel to his mother saying that he is only detained in town by Hanson to sign papers, and that he will proceed home at once, adding a postscript, "You will consider Newstead as your house, not mine; and me only as a visitor." A letter to Hodgson, dated June 29th, within three days of the second anniversary of his departure, tells us the mood in which he returned. He will have to meet a lawyer, then a creditor, then "colliers, fanners, surveyors, and all the agree-

able attachments to estates out of repair, and contested coal-pits." He wants only to get back to Spain or the East, where at least he can find sunshine and be free from impertinence. In the meantime, "my prospects are not very pleasant. Embarrassed in my private affairs, indifferent to public, solitary without the wish to be social, with a body a little enfeebled by a succession of fevers, but a spirit, I trust, yet unbroken, I am returning *home* without a hope, and almost without a desire." Candour cannot fail to see in these words a great deal more than an affectation of melancholy; there is a real misgiving of spirit. Byron was, in fact, frightened of the temptations and conflicts that might await him in England, and the history of the next five years was to show how formidable they were.

Byron had, in these two years, he could tell Dallas on his return, seen everything remarkable in Turkey, "particularly the Troad, Greece, Constantinople, and Albania," though he did not know that he had done anything (except to swim from, etc. . . .) to distinguish him from other travellers. But there was one employment of his absence to which he makes hardly any reference in his letters, and of which we have taken no note in this brief account of his movements. In May 1810, writing to Henry Drury, he says, "I have renounced scribbling." In January 1811, to his mother, "I have done with authorship. . . . It is true I have some others in manuscript, but I leave them for those who come after me," and then to Hodgson in June of the same year, "I have written some 4,000 lines, of one kind or another, on my travels."

On February 16th, 1810, Hobhouse was sitting near midnight in Madame Macri's house at Athens, after an "intolerably sultry" day which was, indeed, the presage of an earthquake. Hobhouse was writing one of the letters in which form he kept the journal that was afterwards published, and Byron, he says, was sitting opposite to him, "better employed." We may be fairly sure that Byron, who had become a great "amateur" of smoking, was enjoying a pipe, and probably a little gin and water, and that he was at work on the second canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. He had begun the first canto, as we know from his

note on the manuscript, at "Joannina in Albania" on October 31st, 1809, finishing it on December 30th, a few days after his arrival in Athens, while the second canto was completed at Smyrna on March 28th, 1810. This accounts for something under two thousand lines of the four thousand mentioned by Byron. In the early part of 1811 he wrote *Hints from Horace* and *The Curse of Minerva*, which added well over a thousand to the total. The rest consisted of short pieces, and possibly the drafts of later work. Just before landing in England he had written to Dallas to tell him that he had an imitation of Horace ready for Cawthorn. Dallas at once called at Reddish's, but, finding Byron not yet arrived, left a note of welcome, offering to introduce to his lordship an accountant who would deal faithfully by all harpies, and expressing his pleasure at hearing of the new work, a little perfervidly thus: "I rejoice to hear that you are prepared for the press. I hope to have you in *prose* as well as verse by and by." On July 15th he had the pleasure of shaking hands with Byron at Reddish's, and found him looking, contrary to reports, extremely well. As the poet was very busy, Dallas shortly left, taking with him the manuscript of *Hints from Horace*, and promising to return next morning for breakfast. On reading the poem he was "grievously disappointed," and, on seeing Byron the next day, he contrived, without disparaging it, to express his surprise that the poet had done nothing else under the inspiration of his adventures. Whereupon Byron, saying that he had written a number of stanzas in Spenser's measure, took from a small trunk the manuscript of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Only one person, he said, had seen it, and had found in it very little to commend and much to condemn. This must have been Hobhouse [1]; Byron said he himself was of the same opinion, but let

[1] In a letter written to the *New Monthly Magazine* for October 1830, Galt says that Hobhouse had complained to him that this charge against him was unfounded. Hobhouse told Galt that he had left Byron before the two cantos were finished, and had seen nothing of them but fragments until they were in print. Hobhouse's word is good, but Galt makes the obvious comment that the second canto was finished on March 28th, 1810, as is shown by the manuscript, and that Hobhouse did not leave Byron until long after that date. If it was not Hobhouse who gave the ill-considered opinion, it is difficult to say who it can have been.

Dallas read it the same day, and, Dallas, to his credit, was enthusiastic: "You have written one of the most delightful poems I ever read."

The work that made Byron famous was by no means a great poem, but it was the work of a great writer who had discovered himself. Its philosophical aspect is of small consequence, and is sustained only by the eagerness of Byron's youthful sensibility. It has neither the spiritual intentness of the young Shelley nor the brooding sense of dedication that for Keats made poetry a destiny from the first. In imaginative pressure *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (I and II) is as far short of *Queen Mab* and *Endymion*[1] as it is beyond them in the sureness and accomplishment of its purpose. For vigour, rapidity of movement, and sharpness of impact, no English poet has, I think, been able at the age of twenty-one to show verse comparable to this of Byron's. The defects of the poem are at once apparent, and they are serious. Of design there is little or none, nor is there any evidence that Byron knew what selection meant. We can discover no controlling impulse that subdues the brilliant material to its own purpose. The creative power is almost uniformly at the command of external suggestion, and contributes, it would seem, hardly more than a superb virtuosity to the general effect. Many striking things that Byron saw on his travels he does not describe, but there is scarcely anything that he does describe that cannot be traced directly to its occasion. The one thing that is constant, and wholly his own, redeeming *Childe Harold* from being splendid poetry of occasion and nothing more, is his magnificent energy. Like some altogether smaller poets, he needed occasion upon which to work, but unlike them he did not have to wait for occasion; not only would any occasion serve, but almost any occasion had to serve. This was largely characteristic of his work throughout his life. Energy with Byron becomes in itself a poetic virtue, perhaps his chief poetic virtue. Left to its own devices, as with Byron it often was, it is a quality that may not be, indeed is not, to everybody's liking. Many people who

[1] The three works represent their respective authors at the age of twenty-one to within a few months. The above remark does not bracket *Queen Mab* with *Endymion* in achievement; that is another question.

get a great deal of pleasure from some poetry, get none from Byron's. In certain cases we suspect that this is because they do not read it, but in others it is a genuinely proved disability. If we admit Byron to the company of great English poets, we have to accept him as the most slovenly of them all. We need not take Byron's affected indifference to authorship very seriously. It was put on and off at will, and that he should in some moods profess his poetry only as a diverting foible was unimportantly like him. But there is a real difficulty of a much graver kind than this feigning, and it has to be acknowledged. It was never true that Byron did not care whether he wrote or not—to write was the most constant and the most constantly gratified desire of his life. But unfortunately it was true that often he did not want with sufficient determination to write as well as he possibly could. He had, without much technical subtlety, immense technical resource; his ingenuity of rhyme and phrase is inexhaustible, and this was one way in which his astonishing energy displayed itself. So that his slovenliness is rarely without some touch of personality; the effect, inexcusable as it is, is at least his own. The result is that if we can dismiss our æsthetic scruples and are willing to take Byron's verse with all its imperfections as forming one texture, we find that it nearly always makes uncommonly good reading. It is a personal opinion only, but a great deal of Byron's poetry—*Childe Harold*, III and IV, for example, *Don Juan*, some of the plays, and many of the shorter pieces—has the merit of being better each time I return to it than I had supposed. These first cantos of *Childe Harold* were far short of Byron's later achievement, but this seems to me to be true of them too. Chastity in the style there is none, but chastity was always as little conspicuous in Byron's art as in his life. The particular kind of discipline that means chastity, intellectual or physical, was not within his range. Few even of the men who are the great figures of the world have all the qualities of greatness, and Byron had nothing of the divine patience that is implicit alike in supreme art and supreme character. Throughout his life he was trying to keep pace with his own rapid and fertile intuition, as incalculable in its flight as

a jacksnipe. In his conduct he was subject, unhappily enough for himself, to disconcerting humours, but it is to ignore evidence to consider him as being merely unprincipled. The truth is that in behaviour there were certain obligations which, indefensibly it may be, he did not admit; but in respect of those that he did he was punctilious. It was in his poetry that his fundamental insecurity really showed itself. His very qualities of gusto and perfectly-timed mobility precluded, it must almost seem, that steady obedience to some spiritual pole or another that governs the greatest poetry. It is, for this reason, useless to seek in Byron any such singleness of vision as resolves all the manifold speculations of a Milton or a Wordsworth. Central vision, indeed, is the quality of greatness in which chiefly his poetry is deficient; but he does everything that genius can in compensation by recording one impression after another with a point and spirit that have hardly been excelled in verse. These are the terms upon which we have to take Byron's poetry, or leave it. He excites, but he does not notably enlarge, our experience; and yet, what a splendid excitement it is. While we are with him we know admiration, delight, exultation even in a faculty so rich and ardent, everything indeed but the glory of the tabernacle. That too we see sometimes far off, but it is for rare moments only. Spiritual revelation, then, it was not Byron's destiny to make. Also we must endure such things as:

> How much
> Hath Phœbus wooed in vain to spoil her cheek,
> Which grows yet smoother from his amorous *clutch*. . . .

and

> Morn dawns; and with it. . . .

and innumerable such infelicities of style and taste. But we have our reward, almost on every page, in the supple, light-limbered verse that Byron stamped with his eager, if variable, mastery for fifteen years or more without tiring:

The wild Albanian kirtled to his knee,
With shawl-girt head and ornamented gem,
And gold-embroidered garments, fair to see;
And crimson-scarfèd men of Macedon;
The Delhi with his cap of terror on,
And crooked glaive—the lively, supple Greek
And swarthy Nubia's mutilated son;
The bearded Turk that rarely deigns to speak,
Master of all around, too potent to be meek,

Are mixed conspicuous: some recline in groups,
Scanning the motley scene that varies round;
There some grave Moslem to devotion stoops,
And some that smoke, and some that play, are found;
Here the Albanian proudly treads the ground;
Half-whispering there the Greek is heard to prate;
Hark! from the mosque the nightly solemn sound,
The Muezzin's call doth shake the minaret,
"There is no god but God!—to prayer—lo! God is great."

The flaws are plain—"too potent to be meek," "mixed conspicuous," and the rest—and these stanzas in their descriptive purpose leave Byron's emotional passion, which was considerable, out of the reckoning; but they show his characteristic style already coming to maturity, and it may as well be allowed that to find them unattractive is probably to have little use for Byron's poetry as a whole. Most people will agree about the three or four celebrated anthology pieces, but these pieces do not account for the poet who remains one of the most arresting figures in our literature in spite of all disparagement. To realise that Byron, we have to assemble in our minds his life, his character, and a representative body at least of the seventy and more thousand lines that are his work.

Whatever detailed criticism may decide about *Childe Harold* (I and II), Dallas was shrewd in seeing that it was exactly right for a public taste that had been educated by and was now rather tired of Walter Scott's narrative poems. With *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), *Marmion* (1808), *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), and *Rokeby* (1812), stories in verse had become so popular a form of reading that in 1814, more than a year be-

fore *Lalla Rookh* was finished, Longman thought it good business, without having seen a line of the poem, to offer Moore three thousand pounds for it to be paid on delivery. But, great story-teller as Scott had proved himself to be, and eagerly as a large public bought his poems, his romantic convention was becoming a little tedious. Readers were beginning to want heroes rather less remote from their own experience than his Rodericks and Marmions, and Childe Harold, a modern young man seeing the sights of Europe and expressing himself in terms of contemporary events and manners, was just the thing for their fancy. Byron himself had hit on the limitation of Scott's method in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers;*

> Say! will not Caledonia's annals yield
> The glorious record of some nobler field
> Than the vile foray of a plundering clan,
> Whose proudest deeds disgrace the name of man?
> Or Marmion's acts of darkness, fitter food
> For Sherwood's outlaw tales of Robin Hood?

and he warned Scott, for whom he had a real enthusiasm, that he could not hope much longer "on public taste to foist thy stale romance." The moment for Byron's own appearance as a romantic poet was then, as Dallas saw, well chosen. In the result, as we know, Byron drove Scott as a poet from his hold on popular favour, and to the great advantage of mankind set him off on the creation of the Waverley novels. Scott took his defeat, as was his way, with perfect chivalry; "My own popularity, as a poet, was then on the wane, and I was unaffectedly pleased to see an author of so much power and energy taking the field."

Immediately after Byron's return to England his mother died quite suddenly. He could not reach Newstead in time to see her alive, and a story that had been in many ways so miserable closed in a brief paroxysm of grief. The occasion provided its appropriate anecdote, Byron refusing to join the funeral procession as it left the house, and falling to a bout of sparring with one

of the servants instead. Just at the same time he lost by death two of the most cherished of his early friends, Charles Skinner Matthews and John Wingfield, and for some months he remained by himself at Newstead in a state of unaffected gloom. "At three and twenty I am left alone," he writes to Dallas, "and what more can we be at seventy?", and a week or two later, to the same correspondent, "I am very sensible of your good wishes, and, indeed, I have need of them. My whole life has been at variance with propriety, not to say decency; my circumstances are become involved; my friends are dead or estranged, and my existence a dreary void." This was in September; in the middle of October he tells Hodgson "I am growing *nervous* . . . wretchedly, ridiculously, fine-ladically *nervous*. Your climate kills me; I can neither read, write, nor amuse myself, nor anyone else. My days are listless and my nights restless; I have very seldom any society, and when I have, I run out of it." He had on hand an action for libel against a paper called *The Scourge*, which had gracefully imputed to him "the pride of doubtful birth," and illegitimate descent from a murderer, and his affairs with Hanson, "a good man and able, but the most dilatory in the world," were "going on as badly as possible." He conducted a theological correspondence with Hodgson, who was about to take orders; but that too wearied him, and he exclaimed, "I will write, read, and think no more; indeed, I do not wish to shock your prejudices by saying all I do think. Let us make the most of life, and leave dreams to Emanuel Swedenborg." He bestirred himself at moments into thinking he was a great disciplinarian at Newstead, and "issued an edict for the abolition of caps; no hair to be cut on any pretext; stays permitted, but not too low before; full uniform always in the evening." Although he professes to have acquired nothing from his travels but "a smattering of two languages and a habit of chewing tobacco"—a habit that he refers to more than once, his eyes are still turned towards the east. He might continue *Childe Harold*, but he would have to return to Greece and Asia for a warm sun and blue sky; "I cannot describe scenes so dear to me by a sea-coal fire." In short, he is as restless as he can be

in body and mind, and feels as old at twenty-three as many men at seventy.

By the end of October 1811 Byron was back in London, after a short visit to Cambridge at the invitation of Scrope Davies, a friend, who, with one or two others, had spent a few days with him during his retirement at Newstead. He took quarters at No. 8 St. James's Street, and continued to revise *Childe Harold* for the printers. After some negotiations with other firms, an arrangement was made whereby John Murray undertook the publication, and thus began a relationship that has become a part of literary history. Byron, as time went on, was often to treat Murray with a fine show of exasperation, sometimes with reason and sometimes without; but Murray dealt with his difficult author liberally, judiciously, and honourably, and, when all has been said, Henley's conclusion fairly sums the matter up: "Murray, in fact, was Byron's publisher, even as Byron was Murray's poet; and to dissociate their several names and fames would, now or ever, be impossible." For some weeks discussion went on between Byron, Dallas, and others as to questionable passages, amendments, additions, and omissions. Byron was infuriated because Murray, without his leave, showed the manuscript to Gifford, which the poet looked upon as soliciting favour from a powerful reviewer. "It is bad enough to be a scribbler, without having recourse to such shifts to extort praise or deprecate censure," he protests to the anxious Dallas, whose next pacific overture is met with, "I *will* be angry with Murray. It was a bookselling, back-shop, Paternoster-row, paltry proceeding." Byron had, in fact, an excessive admiration for Gifford, but his lordship was not going to be under an obligation to any penman of them all. Murray, although he blundered about this, had already begun to learn discretion. Asking Byron to modify passages on Spain and Portugal that might offend popular feeling, he begs that "in compassion to your publisher, who does not presume to reason upon the subject, otherwise than as a mere matter of business, your Lordship's goodness will induce you . . . etc.," and adds that perhaps certain religious sentiments might also be reconsidered, as they may "deprive me of some

customers among the Orthodox." Byron responds suitably to the tone of the letter, but is afraid he can alter nothing.

At length all was ready. Differences were composed, and Dallas had persuaded Byron to put his name to the poem, which at first he refused to do because he was convinced that the persons offended by *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* would overwhelm the work if he did, and also because he was anxious not to be identified with his own hero. He yielded, however, to Dallas, supported by Murray, who insisted that Byron's name would be of essential value to his venture, and he bade Murray let the printers go ahead under Dallas's supervision, placing the notes in their own way or any way so long as they were out of his way, and, for the rest, he himself cared nothing about types or margins. A project for publishing *Hints from Horace* through Cawthorn had been dropped, and the way was clear for *Childe Harold*. It was not until the end of February 1812, however, that the book was ready to appear, and in the meantime Byron's life had been entering upon a new phase.

3

On his return to England, Byron, we remember, had spoken of himself as "solitary without the wish to be social." While he remained at Newstead, he indulged this mood, but he slowly began to renew old acquaintances and form new ones, and, when he went up to London at the end of the year, he soon found himself, whether socially inclined or not, very much socially engaged. He is now writing to Augusta again, telling her that he means to marry, if he can find a suitable exchange of money for rank, and discussing her own ailing finances. The renewed correspondence opens somewhat formally, but soon warms into the old affection. Whatever happens to her fortunes, she knows that she has at all times a brother in him, and a home at Newstead. "You are probably the only being on Earth *now* interested in my welfare," he tells her, and proceeds: "in short, I only want to assure you that I love you, and that you must not think I am indifferent because I don't shew my affection in the usual

way." He wished her to spend Christmas with him and some friends at Newstead, but the proposal came to nothing.

Among the old friends with whom he kept in touch were Hodgson, Harness, Scrope Davies, and Hobhouse. The goodwill of Harness, who later wrote the Life of Miss Mitford, and, like Hodgson, was going into the Church—Byron seems to have got on well with parsons—he particularly cherished. Harness had been one of the smaller boys at Harrow whom Byron had protected, and now, in December 1811, the poet writes: "I have been of late not much accustomed to kindness from any quarter, and am not the less pleased to meet with it again from one where I had known it earliest." Also he tells his friend not to be censorious: "When you are a little older, you will learn to dislike everybody, but abuse nobody." The others he disputed with, sometimes soberly, sometimes, it seems, not. Writing to Hobhouse he supposes he has been tipsy and loquacious as usual; on other occasions he wishes to God that Davies would pull up or he will kill himself; and says that Hodgson, having dined with him, was so "muddled" that he was with difficulty kept in order afterwards at the play. These friendships were, in fact, given to caprice in mood and conduct, as was likely with Byron in the reckoning, but they were in many ways happy and charming. While Byron was preparing *Childe Harold* for publication he formed other connections. The most important of these was to have even more memorable consequences than that with Murray. If Byron's name is inseparably linked with that of his publisher, it is yet more significantly associated with that of his biographer. Since the appearance of Thomas Moore's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron* in 1830, our range of information about the poet has been immensely extended. Lord Ernle, whose six-volume edition of the letters and journals is a masterpiece of scholarship and judgment, has amplified our knowledge in every direction, and given us a great deal of material unknown to or untouched by Moore. Further, the controversy aroused by Mrs. Stowe and *Astarte* was hardly even suggested by the volumes of 1830. Moore's work was incomplete and in some respects inaccurate. Also it was frankly partisan in tone,

though I am not sure that it was any the worse for that. Revised and supplemented opinions were bound to follow any first work upon a figure of Byron's fame and notoriety, and it has been agreeably easy for later investigators to convict Moore of many errors. Inferior commentators are apt to become so intent upon the discovery of some new insignificance about a great poet, some worthless scrap of his doggerel or a mistake in his diary, or so to engage themselves with what Professor Herford has called "barren paradoxes" that they overlook or dispute the solid merit of such a work as Moore's. But responsible criticism does not so allow itself to be misguided, and such of Byron's historians as Lord Ernle[1] have always recognised that it was in Moore's book that the first authoritative outline of the poet's career, upon which all subsequent versions have largely been based, was given. It was here that the first considerable body of Byron's letters was printed, and its records were mostly made from reliable and often from the only sources. Moore's biography, further, embodied the considered and extensive views of one who was himself among the very few men whose friendship with Byron was unimpaired throughout the whole term of their acquaintance, a matter of more than twelve years, and it may be well to glance for a moment at the character of the man by whom this judgment was delivered.

Thomas Moore has to-day, I suppose, little intellectual prestige. The critics of poetry relate him to softly amorous ditties in tinkling anapæsts, and the critics of character vaguely recollect something about lavender gloves and a dapper strut, and that Byron himself said that Tommy dearly loved a lord. Neither impression is conspicuously shrewd. Much, perhaps we should say most, of Moore's verse has perished as surely as he suspected it would do; but some of it, *Fables for the Holy Alliance* for instance, fitly dedicated to Byron, is as alive with witty invention to-day as it was when it made him the most fashionable poet of his time, while a very few of his lyrics are in their kind among the best as they are among the best-known

[1] Though Lord Ernle naturally calls attention to Moore's delinquencies as an editor of Byron's letters. But standards of scholarship were different in those days.

in the language. And Moore himself, for all his spruce little vanities, is one of the most endearing and honourable figures in our literature.

Born in 1779, he was the son of a small Irish tradesman, who drew to the utmost on the resources of a modest grocery business to give his lively young son a chance in the world. By the time he was of age Moore was a *protégé* of the Prince of Wales, and a favourite in society, enchanting everybody by his amiability and address, famous already by his verses as Anacreon Moore, and finding an especial welcome at any gathering for a perfect gift of singing his own poems. The hold he thus secured on popular and fashionable esteem he never lost, and he was manly enough through all his successes never to be embarrassed by, or wish to conceal, his humble origin. His affection for his father and mother, and his anxiety for their welfare, were constant and practical. He refused many offers of official interest for himself, but used his influence freely to obtain a small post in Dublin for his father. Nor were his more nearly domestic affairs less creditable. When he was turned thirty he married a beautiful Irish girl of sixteen, and the marriage was for forty years as prettily a happy one as could be imagined. Moore and his wife married because they were in love with each other, and remained devotedly together for the same reason. They faced success with unfailing good humour, and many trials with as unfailing fortitude. There is a childlike grace in their story. When they are suddenly in funds Bessy writes to her husband that she shall now be able to have butter to her potatoes; when resources are low, and Moore sees her fretting, he surreptitiously sends five pounds to a friend, who is to post it to her, so that she may take her mind off her worries by laying the money out on her favourite vocation of good works.

But Moore's virtues were not only those of amiability and affection. There was plenty of toughness in his character. His reputation as a minstrel made friends for him everywhere. A watchmaker at Niagara insisted on mending his watch for nothing; one sea-captain, a stranger, refused to take passage-money from him; another, on renewing a slight acquaintance in London,

wanted before leaving to give him a blank cheque on his seven-hundred-pound bank balance; when he was taken by Walter Scott to the theatre in Edinburgh the whole pit rose at his entrance, while the band played Irish airs. "I could have hugged them," says Scott in his journal. Moore's fame was marked always by these pleasant enthusiasms. But the man's worth finely stood the sterner tests of more intimate acquaintance. His worldly fortunes were very variable, and at one time he found himself threatened with a liability of six thousand pounds through a business imprudence. Faced by ruin for himself and his family, he was at once surrounded by friends eager to save him. Francis Jeffrey, with whom he had once fought a ridiculous duel, offered to lend him five hundred pounds, without conditions, and a further five hundred on any reasonable security. Leigh Hunt tried to borrow money for him, or at least tried to get somebody else to borrow it. Samuel Rogers came forward with five hundred pounds, Lord Lansdowne offered to deal with the whole debt, Lord John Russell to devote the profits from an important piece of literary work towards getting the poet out of his scrape, and there were others of a like mind. People do not do this sort of thing for a man merely because he is agreeable and they like him; they have also to respect his character and conduct, and his friends soon learnt that they could always depend on Moore to behave well. As it turned out in this case, he escaped disaster without their help.

Nor was his conduct as a man of letters less scrupulous. Hobhouse and Leigh Hunt fell out with him about Byron; but then, everybody fell out with everybody else about Byron. He refused many offers of lucrative employment because they either seemed to him to diminish the dignity of his profession, as when for example he refused to edit annuals of the Keepsake variety on very handsome terms, or because they meant conflict with personal loyalties, as when he refused to become Canning's biographer because he felt he would be expected to speak more freely of a friend than he was prepared to do at political bidding. His punctiliousness was, indeed, considered by some of his friends, among them Lord Lansdowne, at times to be excessive, and in

1835, when he was poor and eminently, as Lord Lansdowne told him, the most suitable recipient of state recognition who could be named, he had almost to be civilly informed that he would have to take a pension whether he liked it or not. Which, in truth, he did like no doubt, as Bessy did; it being on this occasion that she wrote about the potatoes.

Also it must not be supposed that Moore's literary accomplishments were frivolous because he made "light, easy rhymes." He was a recondite and assiduous scholar, surprising Jeffrey with an article on the Patristic writings, translating the classics, investigating German rationalism, and undertaking with credit work that meant not only a knowledge of the social appearances that were familiar to him, but a close study of the political and ideal principles upon which society was built; such work, for example, as his *Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald.* Whether his own political convictions were very passionate ones may be questioned, though as a child he had been taken to see Napper Tandy, and Robert Emmet, whose tragedy he celebrated in two of his good poems, was among his Dublin friends at Trinity College. But, passionate or not, they were held courageously and with a total unconcern for self-interest; which perhaps is to be half-way to passion at least. Added to all this, he gained and kept the affection of many of the most fastidious men of his time, and he was always generous in his recognition of the poets who were his contemporaries, allowing quite happily that his own fashionable success would for the most part be duly forgotten in the days that would more and more establish their reputations.

This, then, is the man of whom Byron said that he was the best-hearted—the only *hearted*—being he had ever known, and that his talents were equal to his feelings, and upon whom Byron's grandson, Lord Lovelace, heaps his patrician scorn. Lord Lovelace in *Astarte* calls Moore a pawner (of the memoirs), a dishonest adventurer, alternatively an Irish adventurer, a thief, or, if Murray only was the thief, then a trafficker in stolen goods, an imparter of his own "mean, vapid varnish of conceit to every one who suffered him to approach them," a party to blackmail

or a blackmailer himself, and, in general terms, a snivelling little blackguard. Before which vortex of opinion any one with the smallest knowledge of the plain facts of Moore's character can only observe that Lord Lovelace's obsession was such as to throw the gravest doubts upon his capacity for judging evidence of any kind.[1]

Moore having quarrelled with Jeffrey, they had met in a duel that ended in fiasco. Byron made fun of the incident in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, and Moore felt obliged to call him out also. Byron had left England, however, and the challenge never reached him; but on his return Moore reopened the matter, and there was some correspondence, concerned and deprecating on Moore's side, stiff and aristocratic on Byron's, with a good deal about honour on both. Which honour being eventually satisfied without "arbitrament of arms," Moore said that he should look upon it as a privilege to meet Byron on other terms, and Byron replied that he should be proud. Moore accordingly asked his friend Rogers to bring them together at dinner; and on November 1st, 1811, Byron wrote a short letter that, slight as it is, seems worth giving in full as a brief epitome of much argument about one side of his character:

Sir,

As I should be very sorry to interrupt your Sunday's engagement, if Monday, or any other day of the ensuing week, would be equally convenient to yourself and friend, I will then have the honour of accepting his invitation. Of the profession of esteem with which Mr. Rogers has honoured me I cannot but feel proud, though undeserving. I should be wanting to myself, if insensible to the praise of such a man; and, should my approaching interview with him and his friend lead to any degree of intimacy with both or either, I shall regard our past correspondence as one of the happiest events of my life.

I have the honour to be

Your very sincere and obedient servant,

Byron.

[1] The story of Moore's life is told in great detail in the eight volumes of memoirs edited by Lord John Russell and published in 1853, an abridgment of which has recently been edited by Mr. J. B. Priestley, and Mr. Stephen Gwynn has contributed an admirable short study of the subject to the *English Men of Letters* Series, to which my acknowledgement is due.

PLATE VI

Childe Harold at Zitza,
near the
Chimariot Mountains.

A man sometimes says a thing that shows quite clearly what his ideal standards are. He may not always do justice in his life to this perception, but the perception itself is an essential part of character. This letter to Moore is an example of what is meant. It shows that no man knew more certainly than Byron what courtesy and good manners were, and the mere knowledge is in itself in his favour. It is very doubtful doctrine that to know the good and choose the evil is a more discreditable thing than not to know good from evil when we see them. And such grace as is in this note was not an affectation in Byron, but a marked excellence. The temper that believes that when Byron behaved so he was posing reminds us of Lord Chelmsford's being accosted by a stranger in St. James's Street with the remark, "Mr. Birch, I believe?"; to which his lordship replied, "If you believe that, sir, you will believe anything," and passed on.

Rogers's dinner-party was a success. Moore and Thomas Campbell were his other guests, and he asked them to withdraw on Byron's arrival, thinking it more convenient to receive his lordship alone. Byron and Moore took to each other at once, and the quartet of poets seem to have spent the evening on general good terms. Byron, indeed, rather disconcerted his host, whose table was one of the most fastidious in London, by saying in turn that he took neither soup nor fish nor mutton nor wine, asking for biscuits and soda-water, which Rogers could not provide, and making his dinner of potatoes and vinegar. After discussing Walter Scott and Joanna Baillie late into the night, Byron went to his club, Rogers learnt, and ate "a hearty supper."

The friendship with Moore advanced rapidly. In December Byron wants to take him down to Newstead, and he tells Hobhouse that he thinks he would like him. The "Sir" of November 1st has become "My dear Moore" by the middle of December. The two poets went out to visit Campbell at Sydenham, but found him not at home, though Moore suspected that he was really in but "nefariously dirty, and would not be seen in a poetical pickle." Byron also cultivated his acquaintance with Rogers, going with him to hear Coleridge lecture, with Olympian candour, on contemporary poetry. Byron observed that if the

lecturer spoke of him—which he did not at all—as he did of Campbell and some of the others, he might be astonished at the consequences. Altogether the young poet was busy and well pleased in his new literary associations, and was gratified to find himself received for his talents—as yet known, it must be remembered, only by *English Bards*—no less than for his position. He also began to think again of politics. He tells Hodgson that he wishes Parliament were assembled, that he might hear, "and perhaps some day be heard." That was in December, and a month later he told Hobhouse that he had resumed his seat in the House, and was intending to try a speech, but as yet was undecided as to the occasion. Then, in February, we find him writing to Rogers and subsequently to Lord Holland about the forthcoming debate on the Frame-work Bill. The Nottingham stocking-makers, panic-stricken by the introduction of a new frame that threatened a slump in manual labour, had become riotous and had destroyed a number of the offending machines, breaking into premises in spite of all precautions and generally displaying violence. The soldiery had been called out, and had made themselves figures of comic opera. Privilege and capital had at last become shocked into taking summary measures, and the new bill was designed to stamp out the insurgency without compromise. It was introduced into the Lords by the Earl of Liverpool, and proposed to make the offence of frame-breaking a capital crime, and the offence of informing a state obligation. The strikers, inspired by a youth named Lud, who had broken the first frame in a half-wit frenzy, were known as Luddites. Byron's Nottinghamshire connections and local knowledge gave him a special interest in the matter, and on February 27th, when the debate came on, "the order for the day for the second reading of this bill being read, Lord Byron rose, and (for the first time) addressed their lordships. . . ."

It is doubtful whether their lordships were fully sensible of the occasion's importance; it is, indeed, certain that they were not. Byron's delivery was, in his own words, "loud and fluent enough, perhaps a little theatrical." The qualification is ominous. Dallas, who heard him rehearse parts of his oration, says: "His

delivery changed my opinion of his power as to eloquence, and checked my hope of his success in Parliament. He altered the natural tone of his voice, which was sweet and round, into a formal drawl, and he prepared his features for a part—it was a youth declaiming a task." It was asking too much of the Upper Chamber to countenance a manner so evidently a manner. Byron, it is true, records that he was handsomely complimented, as he well may have been by a few discerning spirits, but there hangs about the event a certain air of unsuccess. And yet the speech itself was, in its kind, nothing less than magnificent. In the House Byron was, no doubt, betrayed into the fatal diffidence that makes many men do no justice to themselves on public occasions; unsure of himself before an audience, we can hear his tone, a little shrill, a little defensive, a little arrogant, wholly out of keeping with the things that he was saying. But when he was preparing his speech he was, clearly, exalted by real passion to a very high rhetorical pitch. Read aloud now, the irony, the indignation, and the tenderness of the address come stinging into life on a forgotten cause. The arrangement is admirable, and the exposition sparkles with point and energy. One is tempted to quote extracts, but the speech must be read as a whole, or its remarkable momentum is missed. Byron had been told at school that his real gift was that of oratory, and it was small wonder that, however unfortunate the delivery may have been, Lord Holland told him after the debate that he would beat them all if he persevered. Byron, however, was on the eve of an event that put political ambition permanently out of his mind; he was about to become at once the literary lion of a season, and one of the most celebrated poets of an age.

4

The speech on the Frame-work Bill was delivered on February 27th, and by this date *Childe Harold* was through the press, and ready for the final process of distribution. Byron had misgivings to the last, and more than once threatened to suppress the poem. Murray and Dallas, however, were confident, and Gifford's good

opinion had no doubt been circulated in the proper quarters, so that, in Dallas's words, "the critical junto were prepared for something extraordinary." The publication of the first cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is one of the spectacular events of English literature; but our information as to its date is uncertain. Moore gives it as February 29th, 1812, but this is almost certainly too early. Lord Ernle, possibly following Moore's "two days after his speech in the House of Lords" and overlooking leap year, says it was March 1st, which was a Sunday. Mr. Coleridge, from information supplied by the newspaper advertisements, decides on Tuesday, March 10th. These advertisements, however, are themselves inconsistent. On Thursday, March 5th, *The Morning Chronicle* announces that the poem will be published on the following Saturday, and *The Times* that it will be published "in a few days." Notice of actual publication appeared as early as Thursday, March 12th, at latest, and still on Saturday, March 21st, we find the announcement appearing—in *The Times*—"this day is published . . . etc." Dallas, whose account is circumstantial, complains that by Sunday, March 1st, the poem had not appeared, but a review—which he had written—prematurely had. Dallas—aged fifty-eight—was in a fever as to how Byron—aged twenty-four—would take this blunder. The mistimed review would look uncommonly like a puff of the sort that Byron, whatever his modesty may have said, was sensible enough to know could be nothing but detrimental; scandal might even suggest that the poet had written it himself. Byron was staying with Dr. Drury at Harrow, and was not returning to town until Monday evening, so that Dallas had to nurse his anxiety. On Tuesday morning he got a copy of the poem, and hurried off to St. James's Street. Lord Valentia, in the meantime, had considerately supplied Byron with a copy of the offending review, and, for a moment, as Byron exclaimed, "I shall be set down for the writer of it," Dallas had reason to fear the worst. We can imagine him, rather damp-handed, untying the string of his parcel, and displaying the handsome quarto volume, fresh in its brown boards and white label. Byron was appeased by the sight of it, and all was well. On March 5th he asked

Lord Holland to "accept a copy of the thing that accompanies this note." The probability is that there was no specific date of publication, but that copies went out irregularly, and were acknowledged by the papers as it suited their convenience. The success of the book was immediate and convincing. Published at thirty shillings, it went through a first edition of five hundred copies in three days, and four further editions were called for before the end of the year. The critics praised it in print, and wrote enthusiastic letters to the publisher about it. Byron's post was loaded with encomiums, and 8 St. James's Street became a place of fashionable call. While we cannot be sure as to the particular morning on which Byron woke to find himself famous, we know from Dallas that his success was under full sail by March 14th, on which date he sent a copy of the poem to Augusta, with an affectionate inscription. Dallas is, indeed, our best authority for this most propitious moment of Byron's career, and he rose to the occasion in a striking passage:

> He was now the universal talk of the town; his speech, and his poem, had not only raised his fame, to an extraordinary height, but had disposed all minds to bestow upon him the most favourable reception. . . . Crowds of eminent persons courted an introduction, and some volunteered their cards . . . never was there such a sudden transition from neglect to courtship. Glory darted thick upon him from all sides; from the Prince Regent and his admirable daughter, to the bookseller and his shopman; from Walter Scott to . . . [thus Dallas discreetly]; from Jeffrey to the nameless critics of the Satirist, Scourge, etc. He was the wonder of grey-beards, and the show of fashionable parties. At one of these, he happened to go early when there were very few persons assembled; the Regent went in soon after; Lord Byron was at some distance from him in the room. On being informed who he was, his Royal Highness sent a gentleman to him to desire that he would be presented. The presentation of course took place; the Regent expressed his admiration of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and continued a conversation, which so fascinated the Poet . . .

that, in short, Dallas called one morning soon after to find Byron in a new suit of court clothes and "his fine black hair in powder,"

a fashion, Dallas adds, very unbecoming to his countenance. The levee was, however, put off at the last moment, and Byron's court suit was wasted, for he never put it on again. Dallas notes that he was soon diverted by more congenial flattery, and laments that he so far forgot himself with the passage of time as to fall into "the habit of speaking disrespectfully of the Prince." However that may be, everything for the moment was going Byron's way, and Dallas was intoxicated into writing, "I trust all the gloom of his youth will be dissipated for the rest of his life." Never was trust more insecurely founded, but now for the coming months at least the world was Byron's own. His poem was a remarkable one; it was acclaimed by the leaders of literary taste as being even more remarkable than it was. Moreover, the public was not only ready for the new design of his poetry; it found in his mood something of the scepticism and disillusion that were gathering across Europe upon the closing scenes of Napoleon's adventures.

Also, we must remember what it meant to storm London with a reputation in 1812. The notoriety that comes and goes in twenty-four hours was less common in those days when the blessed union between a marketable peerage and a popular press was undreamt of. But it was a far easier thing then than now suddenly to impress the town, or that part of the town that any given activity could appeal to, by real merit; and, once the impression was made, it was not easily forgotten. The population of London was hardly a million. Coachmen driving across Berkeley Square might have to pick their way through the flocks that drovers were taking to Smithfield. Passing through the toll-gate at Hyde Park Corner, pedestrians would gather in little companies for security against footpads before setting out on the turnpike for the villages of Knightsbridge and Kensington. The impact of any remarkable talent upon this leisurely little capital city was far more decisive and significant than it can be upon the incoherence that is modern London. If a writer could get the approval of three or four established critics, the recommendation of half a dozen dinner-tables, and the support of as many booksellers, his fame was like to be established

and his fortune made. There were, it is true, far fewer rewards that were at the public's disposal, but the individual rewards could be as great as they are now. Covent Garden Theatre could afford to pay Betty a hundred pounds a performance. The suggestion is not that it was then any easier to acquire or discover the gifts necessary to substantial success, but that with the gifts it was far easier to make an effect that was worth making. We are used in our community to the sudden wide notorieties of which I have spoken, and to equally sudden accessions of prestige among small and isolated groups; but it is difficult for us to realise a success at once sudden, dazzling, general, and rooted, such as attended Byron on the publication of *Childe Harold*. After that triumph nothing could make his name an inconsiderable one in literature, and nothing did. Reverses of public and critical opinion left him still one of the great figures of his time, as he and everybody else knew. He refused to touch the six hundred pounds that Murray paid Dallas for the copyright of *Childe Harold*, declaring that he would never take a penny for his writings; but he relented afterwards, and first and last received a sum approaching twenty thousand pounds as an author. When he made his sensational entry into public notice in 1812 his reputation was secure.

Added to all this, the new poet obviously had great social attractions. He was young, but no longer callow; he was good-looking certainly; probably, so far as evidence can be tested, with some claims to unusual beauty. He had a universally admitted charm of manner at command, he was a wit, he had seen remote and interesting places, he had made at least a notable appearance in the House of Lords, and, as Moore shrewdly observes, his claim for Childe Harold that he "was not unskilful of the spoiler's art" was not likely altogether to escape an insinuating application. These were advantages indeed with which to emerge from obscurity upon an astonished world. He had the friendship or good-will of the poets and of fashionable intellect; and in circles of gallantry, the Duchess of Devonshire noted, the men were jealous of him and the women of each other.

Before following Byron through the season of his first ascen-

dency, we may give a further moment's attention to his financial position now and hereafter. Byron was often dunned, but, like many who suffer the same misfortune, he cannot be said to have ever been poor in a literal sense. Large fortunes are always something enigmatic in their processes to those who have never enjoyed them. It is remarked that a man who is a hundred pounds on the wrong side in his bank balance can hardly find a sixpence for his tube fare and a sandwich, while he who is a hundred thousand in the same condition can still have his landaulette waiting for him outside the Ritz. Wealth in high altitudes seems to function as it were on two wholly independent planes. My impression from the correspondence between Byron and Hanson is that the poet's position was often precarious to the point of somewhat heavy insolvency; it seems to have been Byron's impression too; but doubtless he was as deluded as I am. What is clear is that he somehow never had to beg or borrow, or go short of a thirty-five shilling dinner when he wanted it. On the lower plane there is no evidence that he was at any time embarrassed. On the higher, he suffered many anxieties. After repeated assurances that nothing would induce him to sell Newstead, he put the estate up to auction at Garraway's Coffee House in Exchange Alley, on August 14th, 1812. Hobhouse attended the sale with him, and bid twelve times to keep the competition going. He got up to 113,000 guineas, as he says, "in a complete fever." A reserve of £120,000 had been placed on the property, which was bought in at 113,500 guineas. Hobhouse, as he himself tells us, had at the time one pound one shilling and sixpence in the world.[1] After a later abortive transaction in which a defaulting purchaser forfeited £25,000, Newstead was ultimately sold in 1817 for £94,500. Byron's Rochdale estate was the subject of even more protracted negotiations, being finally disposed of for something over £30,000 in 1824, six weeks before its owner's death. For the rest, it is enough to say that Byron seemed always able to find money when in need, which was constantly.

[1] Lord Broughton, *Recollections of a Long Life*, vol. i, p. 45. Lord Ernle (*Letters and Journals*, vol. ii, p. 162) follows Dallas in giving the highest bid as £90,000.

Byron enjoyed the success of his poem, and of his personality. Dallas surprised him reading *Childe Harold* at St. James's Street, and induced him without difficulty to continue doing so, aloud. The Princess Charlotte ordered a copy to be specially bound, and this was exhibited for some days in the window of a Bond Street bookshop. Dallas says that Byron was highly pleased when he described the copy to him; but we suspect that this may have been unnecessary. This was as it should be, but Dallas grew concerned as Byron, protesting that he would accept none of society's invitations, very soon found himself accepting them all. This also was well enough, in moderation, and Dallas's anxiety was not altogether disinterested, as we shall see. Byron was taking the rewards of fortune as lavishly as they were offered, and Dallas, in observing that "flattery had now deeply inoculated him with its poison," was moralising the situation without much common sense. But, moralise as little as we will about Byron, there is no escaping the fact that the years 1812-1814 were a crucial period in the formation of his character, and that during the height of his London favour brilliant advantages were turned in many respects to very tawdry account. Our business is the record of things that were, not speculation as to what might have been, and in any case it is as good an argument as another that a man is what he must be, and that Byron developed in his environment in the only way possible to him. And yet for a moment we may reflect that, with some rather better luck of mood or associations, he might just have toughened his character during those years instead of relaxing it. It is not that he allowed himself the indulgences of a successful young man of fashion; the indulgences were, in fact, a good deal more modest than might be supposed. He might get drunk with Sheridan once in a while, but, as has been pointed out, we hear at least as much about tea and biscuits and soda-water and vegetables and vinegar as about excesses. Moreover, he took exercise with diligent regularity, and, although for a time he was less prolific than usual, he continued to do a good deal of work. Nor were his adventures in gallantry necessarily of any great consequence to the moulding of his character. They will claim our attention,

but their interest is dramatic without being profoundly psychological. The danger, and to some extent the disaster, into which his chosen direction led him were the effect not so much of specific conduct as of the light in which that conduct was by himself regarded. He gained a reputation for libertinism which was, if the truth must be known, but very inadequately earned; but he enjoyed the reputation, and in time came to react towards it with a cynicism that was the worst possible mood in which his particular nature could function. From the seeds of character so fostered at this time sprang, very largely, the uglier passages of his behaviour in the later years. The second-rate histrionic instinct that was by far the least admirable aspect of Byron's mind was encouraged from the beginning of his popularity in London. It was further stimulated by such intimacies as that which opened in the middle of 1812 with Lady Melbourne, and in the circumstances of his marriage and separation it reached a crisis from which he was only beginning to recover when he died in Greece. It is the conflict of Byron the essential poet with this other Byron begotten by society upon his own weaknesses that is really the *leitmotif* of his story.

5

Byron's first literary activity after the publication of *Childe Harold* was to suppress *English Bards*, the fifth edition of which Cawthorn was about to publish. This Byron did in deference to his new friend Lord Holland, who was offended by the satire. Cawthorn was indignant, but since, as Dallas points out, he had taken all the profits from the earlier editions and was reimbursed for the expenses of the new one, his only just grievance was that he had not been allowed to share in the success of *Childe Harold*. Another enterprise, unimportant in itself, which engaged a good deal of Byron's attention and involved a long correspondence with Lord Holland was the composition of the address recited by Elliston at the reopening of Drury Lane Theatre in October 1812. The theatre had been burnt out early in 1809, and the committee of management invited the

poets to send in addresses, of which one was to be selected to inaugurate the opening of the new building. Byron at first intended to compete, but finally decided not to. When the addresses were sent in, however, none was considered suitable by the committee, who then requested Byron to supply the want. This he did, with no discredit to a memorable occasion, and the incident was no doubt in part responsible for his later connection with the management of the theatre.

Byron's marriage, with all its sinister consequences, was, as it seems to me, the climax of an action in which the stages were a succession of intrigues that in their several sorts touched every point in the emotional vortex. It will, therefore, be fitting to tell of these adventures in a continuous series. And, that our narrative may take a direct line through these to his final departure from England, it will be convenient at this point to note a little more fully some other aspects of his life in the years when he was, in Lord Ernle's phrase, the idol of society.

He was engaged, then, agreeably from hour to hour in accord with the *beau monde* of which he so suddenly found himself a courted favourite. He was on two occasions nominated by the principals to act in affairs of honour, and on both was successful in inducing the antagonists to spare each other. He was loyal to his old acquaintances, and cultivated his new ones. He received a letter of exquisite courtesy from Walter Scott, and replied in terms that proved in him a spirit that could respond to any mood, however fine. If Scott was a great gentleman, he found that Byron could be one too; and, while the best disposition may fall from its own example at times, as Byron's did, it is easy enough, unless we are intellectually perverse, to distinguish right from spurious manners. Byron's manners, when tried by such communications as Scott's, were perfect. He read widely, making Murray his librarian; he interested himself in the way of the most liberal of modern employers in the welfare of his Newstead servants; he offered to stand security to Hodgson for a loan when he had no notion as to what his own resources were, and eventually lent him fifteen hundred pounds himself; he invoked Hanson's aid to deliver him from the designs of a

madwoman whom he had never seen, but who nevertheless was convinced that he was desperately in love with her; he sat up all night with two of his old schoolfellows to see Bellingham, the murderer of Spencer Perceval, executed, having taken a window in Newgate Street for the purpose; he regretted that he could not dress Murray as a Turk or Albanian for a masquerade, as his wardrobe was out of London; he spoke twice more in the House of Lords, without increasing or diminishing his reputation there; he thought he would go abroad, and then thought he wouldn't. On one occasion, when he had guests at Newstead, he forgot his usual habit to the extent of taking a bottle of claret at a draught from his skull-cup after an evening's ample drinking, with the result that, on going up to his room instead of joining the ladies, he fell into what Fletcher persuaded himself was a mortal fit; he sparred with Jackson; he was generally in condition, with bad days, wishing now that he had an ostrich's digestion, now that his head had been given him for some other purpose than to ache; and, in spite of contentions, he could note with some alarm at the end of 1813 that he began to find himself liking everybody. He was a good playgoer, admiring Kemble, Kean, Mrs. Jordan, and Mrs. Siddons—who was, he thought, worth them all—and finding Congreve and Vanbrugh "your only comedy," and his own good opinion was courted in the theatre, as elsewhere. On going to Cambridge to record a vote, he was greatly affected when, on entering the Senate House, he was received by the undergraduates with an outburst of applause. At twenty-five he was a national figure.

His literary preoccupations in these years were constant, however spasmodic his production may have been. He still had his fulminating moods; "I do think the preference of *writers* to *agents* . . . a sign of effeminacy, degeneracy, and weakness. Who would write, who had anything else to do? . . . Look at the querulous and monotonous lives of the 'genus' . . . what a worthless, idle brood it is!" But his letters testify continually to the increased range of his own reading and to his curiosity about contemporary literature. Among his new acquaintances at this time were Sheridan, Southey, Leigh Hunt, and Madame

de Staël. The lady he thought the cleverest woman he had ever known; but she talked too much for his fancy, and he found her society overwhelming, "an avalanche that buries one in glittering nonsense—all snow and sophistry." She scolded Byron for being "totally *in*sensible to *la belle passion*," and for having been so all his life, and she told Lady Caroline Lamb "*c'est un démon*." She was twenty years older than Byron, and the oracles of different generations were probably not much concerned in each other. However, she amused him by the advice to "Stick to the East" as being the only poetical policy, and he pleased her by an unexpected compliment in a note to one of his poems. For Sheridan, who was now sixty, he had a real attachment. He went, he says, into training to dine with him, and, when the battered old wit and dramatist was sued by Hanson on behalf of a client for a wine bill, Byron was delighted to find the attorney completely captivated on his first meeting with the debtor, and ready if needs be to throw his client out of the window. "Lord Holland," notes Byron in his journal, "told me a curious piece of sentimentality in Sheridan"; Byron had said that whatever Sheridan had chosen to do had always been the best of its kind; "Somebody told S. this the next day, and on hearing it he burst into tears! Poor Brinsley! if they were tears of pleasure . . . I would rather have said these few, but most sincere, words than have written the *Iliad*. . . ."

In spite of his distaste for Southey's poetry, Byron found himself in some admiration for the man when he first met him, which was at Holland House in September 1813; "the best-looking bard I have seen for some time. To have that poet's head and shoulders, I would almost have written his Sapphics. He is certainly a prepossessing person to look on, and a man of talent, and all that. . . ." This he wrote to Moore, and two months later he notes in his diary that Southey's appearance is Epic, his talents of the first order, his prose perfect, and he even goes so far as to say that his poetry has passages equal to anything. But there was no possibility of any real understanding between the two poets, each being peculiarly fitted by nature to perceive the other's defects of character. Years afterwards, Southey recalled his

impression of something latently tigerish on first meeting Byron. He may or may not have imagined this in the light of intervening ferocities, but in any case nothing afterwards came of the introduction but a few perfunctory meetings, and Southey was later the mark of Byron's most uncompromising and brilliant, though not his fairest attack.

Byron first saw Leigh Hunt in the summer of 1813 at the Surrey county gaol, where Hunt was imprisoned for his article on the Prince Regent in *The Examiner*. Byron at first liked him; "It is my wish that our acquaintance, or, if you please to accept it, friendship, may be permanent." And, inevitably, he admired his political courage. "I have a thorough esteem for that independence of spirit which you have maintained with sterling talent," and in the journal we find: "Hunt is an extraordinary character, and not exactly of the present age. He reminds me more of the Pym and Hampden times. . . . He has been unshaken, and will continue so. . . . He is, perhaps, a little opinionated . . . as even Johnson was; but, withal, a valuable man, and less vain than success and even the consciousness of preferring 'the right to the expedient' might excuse." Hunt repaid Byron's good opinion with his own, but these promising beginnings were destined to come to a dismal end in later years. Leigh Hunt is one of those curious characters that provoke us to dissent from whatever opinion of them may be advanced at the moment. When he is praised all our sense of his vulgarities and of his odd shifts of conduct rises in protest, and we remember Keats's renunciation of his early idolatry: "He is vain, egotistical, and disgusting in matters of taste and morals.[1] Hunt does one harm by making fine things petty, and beautiful things hateful." And then, as soon as Keats's words come into our mind, we are on the defensive. We recall the intrepidity of Hunt's public life, his domestic loyalty, his lifelong struggle with penury, his devotion to letters, and the charm and insight of some of his own writing. He is, perhaps, the least satisfactory of the considerable figures in a great age of our literature, but he remains a considerable

[1] Not, as Miss Amy Lowell properly notes, personal morals in the narrow sense.

figure nevertheless. We shall see the worst of him in Byron's story, but he does not take any important place in that story for some time yet.

Another acquaintance of this time was Matthew Gregory—"Monk"—Lewis. Byron admired him, as he did Madame de Staël; but he found him, as he found her, too talkative. A very good author he thought him, and "a good and good-humoured man, but pestilently prolix. . . . If he would but talk half, and reduce his visits to an hour, he would add to his popularity." In March 1814 Byron, having in the meantime left St. James's Street for Bennet Street, moved into apartments in the Albany, of which he had taken a lease of seven years. Seven years were to tell a tale tragically beyond his reckoning, but already there are disquieting signs to be observed. The complexity of his love intrigues had ceased to be romantically amusing, and was becoming desperate, as we shall shortly see; and there were other anxieties. The tide of public favour had not turned, but there were indications that it was not quite steadily set in one direction. A month before he moved into the Albany he had thrown the town into a controversy that had been conducted with great violence of temper. In the early part of 1812 a scene that became notorious had taken place at Carlton House, the residence of the Prince Regent. On that occasion the Prince's daughter, Princess Charlotte, had been reduced to tears by a public altercation between her father and some of his ministers. A few days later *The Morning Chronicle* printed an anonymous poem, of which the first stanza ran:

> Weep, daughter of a royal line,
> A Sire's disgrace, a realm's decay,
> Ah! happy if each tear of thine
> Could wash a Father's fault away!

The verses were in no way remarkable, and, the authorship being undivulged, little notice was taken of them. Two years later, however, in the second edition of *The Corsair*, Byron acknowledged them as his own. Why he troubled to do so is unexplained. It was after the occasion of the lines that he had

been presented to the Prince, and the quarrel, whatever it may have been, was forgotten. There seems to have been no good reason for reviving it in a set of verses that were themselves hardly worth preserving. But Byron was fixed on making his public claim to them, and his instructions to Murray were peremptory: "The 'Lines to a Lady Weeping' must go with *The Corsair*. I care nothing for consequences, on this point." The consequences were immediate. Byron returned to London in the middle of February to find "all the newspapers in hysterics, and town in an uproar." The issue can hardly concern us here, but the manner in which it was debated does. Indirectly a political question was involved, and it was taken up by the press with the utmost bitterness of party faction. But the attack on Byron was, we may easily discern, really inspired by more personal reasons. His brilliant and legitimate success had aroused the jealousy and his satires had provoked the resentment of a host of seedy talents that were hungry for an excuse to discredit him; and here was an opportunity of exceptional promise. The immediate charge was that Byron's lines were an offence against royal privilege and the sanctity of filial ties. The assailants, acquainted as they were with the affairs of the Prince's household, knew perfectly well that this pretence was a piece of public impudence; but they knew also that, given the right tone, it was an impudence that could not be answered. "Nothing can be more repugnant to every good heart," declared *The Morning Post*, "as well as to the normal and religious feelings of a country, which we are proud to say still cherishes every right sentiment, than an attempt to lower a father in the eyes of his child." How familiar the note sounds, how safe, and how unscrupulous. *The Courier* opened on the same line of attack, and made heavy play of the "disgrace" that had lately befallen the realm under the Regent's government. But this was a prelude only to an intensive campaign, in which *The Courier* took an enthusiastic lead. In less than three weeks that paper devoted eight considerable editorial articles to the matter. Byron had specifically disgraced himself; *The Courier* would let it be seen what sort of person he was in general terms. Consistency in a young poet who

is learning about the world at high pressure from day to day is not notably a merit for which we look. Byron himself, in his private records, had written in December: "This journal is a relief. When I am tired—as I generally am—out comes this, and down goes everything. . . . God knows what contradictions it may contain. If I am sincere with myself . . . every page should confute, refute, and utterly abjure its predecessor." No view could be more natural and intelligible, but none could be more damagingly exposed by malice. Byron's conduct, if we choose to test it by moral tags and not by the larger morality of character, was frequently throughout his life an easy mark for censure. *The Courier* did so choose, and it had a grateful task. In *English Bards* two of the objects of Byron's mockery had been Lord Holland and Thomas Moore; now he had addressed them both in highly flattering dedications. In that poem Murray also had been pilloried for exacting half a crown a line from the public to reward Scott's muse; now Byron had employed Murray as his own publisher, and was receiving twice that sum.[1] The poet had dedicated his first book to Lord Carlisle, and had lampooned him in his second. All of which and much more was very effective debating material, and *The Courier* exploited it with perfect journalistic adroitness. That Byron had suppressed *English Bards* because it was unfair to men who were now his friends and who bore him no grudge on the score of the indiscretions of ignorance it was not *The Courier's* business to know; it was, indeed, its business not to know it. In a device well known to the technique of this sort of thing, the journal concluded on a note of self-congratulation, thus:

> We should now, with all humility, ask his lordship whether *he* yet feels that "he *too* is penetrable stuff,"[2] and we should further wish to know how he likes being "*broken on the wheel he meant for others*"? When his lordship shall have sufficiently pondered on those questions, we may perhaps venture to propound one or two more.

[1] Byron received none of it, but *The Courier* could not know this until Dallas wrote a handsome letter of explanation to the press.
[2] See *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, ll. 1050 and 1060.

The Morning Post enlisted in the cause a team of the world's worst rhymers, one of whom observed in a note that "most of the best judges place his lordship rather low in the list of our minor poets." These pseudonymous bards lend a spice still to the controversy. "Horatio" writes:

> For this does Byron's muse employ
> The calm, unbroken hours of night?
> And wou'd she basely thus destroy
> The source of all that's just—upright?

"Unus Multorum" takes up the burden:

> Bard of the pallid front and curling hair,
> To London taste, and northern critics dear,
> Friend of the dog, companion of the bear,
> Apollo drest in trimmest Turkish gear.
>
> 'Tis thine to eulogise the fell Corsair,
> Scorning all laws that God or man can frame;
> And yet so form'd to please the gentle fair,
> That reading misses wish their Loves the same.

On the same day an anonymous poet takes a rhapsodical turn:

> Lord *Byron!* Lord *Byron!*
> Your heart's made of iron, . . .

rising to

> As long as your aim
> Was alone to defame
> The nearest relation you own,
> At your malice he [God] smiled,
> But he won't see defil'd,
> By your harpy bespatt'rings, the Throne.

The Sun doubted whether Byron's offence could be made the subject of a criminal prosecution, but was assured that the Lords would devise a means of expelling so disreputable a member from their assembly. *The Morning Chronicle* defended Byron,

on the ground that it was a peer's privilege to admonish the sovereign if he felt it his duty to do so, but there was naturally no counter to the retort that the lines had been published without Byron's name. Dallas, in his letter to *The Morning Post* tried, ineffectually, to show that the verses referred to a single incident only and could have no general application. The quarrels of the Regency court need detain us no longer. Byron, we may believe, meant what he wrote, but he was clumsy in his way of publishing it, and he got himself into a public scrape in consequence. He made no attempt to defend himself, and indeed the only part of the indictment against him worth answering he knew to be unanswerable in terms that his assailants would allow themselves to understand. The significant thing for us at this distance is the temper in which the attack upon him was conducted. The opposition had declared itself, and it was formidable. His first false step in public had been no more than an indiscretion, but the most had been made of it. Should he at any time commit himself more seriously, it was plain that the jackals were ready and that no quarter would be shown.

6

Envy had, indeed, a great deal to put up with. Byron's popularity as a poet was brilliantly maintained in the years following the publication of *Childe Harold*, and it was tiresome not to be able to dismiss it as spurious, since, whatever *The Morning Post* poetasters might say, the best judges placed his lordship anything but low on the list of anything but minor poets. We feel now that much of his achievement in those years was overrated, but it was overrated by many of the most authoritative critics of the time. Between the appearance of *Childe Harold* in March 1812 and his marriage at the beginning of 1815, Byron published:

The Waltz (early in 1813—anonymously)
The Giaour (June 1813)
The Bride of Abydos (November 1813)

The Corsair (January 1814)
Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte (April 1814)
Lara (August 1814)

Statistically these works in their final form amounted to some six thousand lines; poetically they were a mixed lot, and Byron's fame could very well suffer the loss of most of them. There are, however, still characteristic merits to be found among them, and they have also considerable biographical interest.

Byron's own age read into these poems a significance that no longer survives. It analysed their moral implications, it found in them abstruse psychological problems, and it disputed hotly upon the poet's identity with his own heroes, in a way that we have the advantage of seeing to have been a little absurd. That there was something of a mood familiar to Byron himself in his Giaour and Conrad and Lara we may admit, but it was a mood that represented no more than an obscure but shallow dramatisation of himself. His recollections of the East and of his adventures there, whatever these last may have been, were an agreeable relief from a reality that he found pressing somewhat hardly upon him in those London days. The truth is that Byron, with his poetical success, his social prestige, his political interests, his private intrigues and his public skirmishes, had engaged himself with more of life than even his remarkable energy could properly manage. "When I am tired—as I generally am . . ."; this was not the complaint of mere aimless dissipation, but the logical confession of a man swept along by an impulse that was undisciplined and perilous, but neither trivial nor sterile. And the narrative poems of that time, far from being an imaginative expression of life as he was then finding it, were a highly mannered attempt to escape from it. In his early satires and the first cantos of *Childe Harold* Byron had in his own poetic idiom expressed himself. The narratives that followed are, with one exception, of an infinitely less vital character. Hazlitt, whose essays on the English poets lost most of their profundity when he came to his contemporaries, flattered the popular superstition in saying, "The Giaour, the Corsair, Childe Harold, are all the

same person, and they are apparently all himself." Keats, with his incomparable intuition, came much nearer to the truth when he said, "Lord Byron cuts a figure, but he is not figurative. Shakespeare led a life of allegory: his works are the comments on it." Hazlitt was improvising on a current theme, Keats was divining. In the later *Childe Harold*, in *Don Juan*, and in some other pieces, Byron in his own way was "figurative" beyond any cavil: he had been so, less decisively, in some of his earlier work; but in these narrative poems, even in the one success among them, it is precisely what he was not. If ever there was poetry that bears all over it the stamp of make-believe it is to be found in these excursions that Byron made away from a cascade of experience that was threatening to overwhelm him. This is clear enough from the poems themselves, and it is clear too on Byron's own explicit authority. He started to write a prose romance, but after he had completed some pages of it destroyed them because the story insisted on getting too near to reality. Of *The Bride of Abydos* he writes in his journal, "It was written in four nights to distract my dreams from . . . Were it not thus, it had never been composed: and had I not done something at that time I must have gone mad. . . ." And again: "I am much more indebted to the tale than I can ever be to the most partial reader; as it wrung my thoughts from reality to imagination—from selfish regrets to vivid recollections." The argument need be pursued no further. To read dark meaning into his poems may have amused the critics of Byron's own time, but it is profitless for us; still idler is it to advance them in support of specific charges, as has been done freely in the past. They are neither more nor less than verse narratives in the manner for which, as we have seen, he had challenged Scott in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers;* and they are to be judged for their entertainment as such.

This standard reduces the test to arbitrarily personal terms. There is no accounting for individual likes or dislikes for a given story. We may mix our chronology for the moment, and include in our present consideration *The Siege of Corinth* and *Parisina*, which were published together in February 1816, within

a few weeks of Byron's separation from his wife. For myself, then, I find *The Giaour*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, and *The Siege of Corinth* the least attractive work of a great poet. They are good enough to read by the fireside, and forget. The stories are complicated, and not worth unravelling. I am confused as to whether Lara was Conrad in a new dispensation, and whether the page Kaled was really Gulnare in disguise, and I am not sufficiently interested to settle my doubts by closer investigation. The involutions of plot defeat me, and I am willingly defeated. There are frequent passages of fine spirit and colour, but I am content to take each effect in isolation as it comes along. The writing for the most part is careless but accomplished, though in *The Siege of Corinth* the accomplishment hardly survives as slovenly an exhibition of doggerel as ever belittled a poet of parts.

> Up to the sky like rockets go
> All that mingled there below:
> Many a tall and goodly man,
> Scorched and shrivelled to a span,
> When he fell to earth again
> Like a cinder strewed the plain:
> Down the ashes shower like rain;
> Some fell in the gulph, which received the sprinkles
> With a thousand circling wrinkles. . . .

The poem is full of it, and it is Byron at his low-water mark. Byron's offences against poetry are now commonly recognised, and they need not be re-stressed. But it may be well to admit once and for all that this kind of writing was really discreditable. It will not do to say that Byron did not care; he did care, with all the sensitiveness of a first-rate talent, but his shame was that, caring, he was yet at times willing to betray his own spirit. He cannot have read the proofs of *The Siege of Corinth* without knowing that passage after passage was wholly unworthy of him. Byron was a personality of absorbing interest, with remarkable qualities both of tenderness and strength; also he was a poetic energy of a very high order. But there was in him, both as a man and as a poet, just a streak of the vulgarian, and nowhere do we see it more distressingly than in such lamentable perform-

ances as the bad passages of this poem. A striking contrast may be observed in this respect between Byron and Keats. The one born to rank, a man of wealth and fashion, moving as a familiar and in eminence among the brightest wits and scholars of his time, with a natural genius that has survived all the shocks of contention, and yet in his art capable of lapsing into mere slatternly bad breeding; the other the son of an ostler, suburban in his contacts, beyond the notice of any powerful patronage, struggling through a drab and obscure nonage to a few not very propitious literary associations, and yet in his art, in spite of early indiscretions, one of the most scrupulous aristocrats who ever lived. Enough has been said; so much would not have been necessary save in strict justice to Byron himself. His poetical misdemeanours have for many people obscured his great and very rewarding poetical power. It is well to acknowledge the faults without more ado, but to remark that they were faults committed in spite of and not because of the mind that has held the attention of Europe for over a hundred years, and will continue to do so.

The Bride of Abydos, although much of the same character as the four poems just mentioned, makes altogether happier reading. At least it does for myself. It is not remarkable enough in the body of English poetry to make one enquire very closely why this should be so, but there it is. Of *Parisina*, however, the impression is much more emphatic. The story takes a somewhat drily melodramatic turn in its conclusion, but for the rest the poem is one of very great force and beauty. An enchanting verse measure is used with unquestionable mastery for tragic purposes, and, although the setting is Eastern still, the Albert Hall paraphernalia have been discarded for a spectacle that is at once fresh and convincing. Moreover, in this poem Byron realises that his gift is not for narrative complexity and profusion, but for bold dramatic outline. Of this aptitude more will be said later. In *Parisina* the simplest possible plot is developed with admirable precision, and the characters of Parisina, Azo, and Hugo are presented in perfectly realised contrast. The romantic emotion of the poem is, further, far more convincing than

anything of the kind that Byron had achieved before. Hugo's defence before his father is superb both in movement and context, and the poem as a whole is a great advance on any of Byron's earlier sustained efforts. Gifford—something of a critical scamp, but not much of a critical fool—was unduly restrained in saying that its author had never surpassed *Parisina*. That this poem should have appeared in the same volume as *The Siege of Corinth* without provoking every critic to astonishment at the extreme disparity of merit between the two is hardly less remarkable than the disparity itself.

But these critical distinctions meant nothing to the popular taste of the time. This was bestowing its favours on Byron without conditions, and one poem after another sold in incredible numbers. Twelve substantial editions of *The Giaour* were issued in less than eighteen months; Dallas records that, in December 1813, *The Bride of Abydos* was enjoying an equal popularity; Murray says that he sold ten thousand copies of *The Corsair* on the day of publication, and twenty-five thousand within three months. Of *Lara*, which was published—in a volume with Rogers's *Jacqueline*—on an August Saturday in 1814, six thousand copies were sold on the first day. *The Siege of Corinth* and *Parisina* appeared at the moment of Byron's matrimonial collapse, and in the absence of reports we may surmise that it had for the moment a less sensational sale than its predecessors. Murray, however, sent Byron a thousand guineas for the copyright. This the poet at first declined; then he proposed to give six hundred pounds of it to that arch-sponge, William Godwin, and the rest to Coleridge and another; we are glad, on Godwin's account, that Murray sensibly objected to this, and Byron was eventually persuaded to accept the money for himself.

The Waltz is an unimportant satire on the dance newly imported from Germany, but mildly interesting as showing that Byron, like other rakes, was subject to stout moral prejudices; though in this case the prejudice was probably aggravated by his own disability. We remember the little squall with Mary Chaworth. The *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte* upset Hazlitt, as it has

done later commentators. Byron blew hot and cold about Napoleon—not, I think, very surprisingly. The poet's political morality in this may have been questionable, but the fact remains that he greatly admired in Napoleon a power and swiftness and resource that stirred his own ambitions, and he watched the approaching and inglorious end with a disdain that might have been borrowed from the philosophy of Napoleon himself. Byron's idol had failed him, and the *Ode* is forged in the white heat of invective. On its smaller scale it ranks with *Parisina* as the most satisfying work that Byron did up to the time of the separation. There is more than promise in the poet who could range from the enchantment and force of *Parisina* to the swelling rhetoric of:

> The Spaniard, when the lust of sway
> Had lost its quickening spell,
> Cast crowns for rosaries away,
> An empire for a cell;
> A strict accountant of his beads,
> A subtle disputant on creeds,
> His dotage trifled well:
> Yet better had he neither known
> A bigot's shrine, nor despot's throne.
>
> But thou—from thy reluctant hand
> The thunderbolt is wrung—
> Too late thou leav'st the high command
> To which thy weakness clung;
> All Evil Spirit as thou art,
> It is enough to grieve the heart
> To see thine own unwrung;
> To think that God's fair world hath been
> The footstool of a thing so mean.

Passion, sensibility, high spirits, an amazingly quick eye, fearlessness, a keen sense of poetic tradition, an unerring instinct not for the subtleties but for the saliences of character and landscape —these were the qualities that Byron could command in the service of his individual gift of creation. The infinite patience, the inexorableness, of genius were his barely by the slenderest holding, as we have seen. Nor do we to-day follow his contemporaries in

debating the constructive philosophy of his poetry, and its edifying or dangerous influences; we accept Goethe's as the last word, "the moment Byron begins to reflect, he is a child." But Goethe knew the full measure of Byron's great gifts, and this measure was now beginning to announce itself. In addition to the longer poems of these years Byron wrote a number of short pieces, some of which were included in the *Childe Harold* volume, some left uncollected at the time, and some published as *Hebrew Melodies* at the beginning of 1815, shortly after his marriage. Many of these are trifling, and Byron is not a poet whose trifles much interest us. Among them, however, are a few lyrics that catch the note of his progress. He could at times use the common measures with perfect judgment, but he could also do something inexplicably odd with them, as in:

> As clouds from yonder sun receive
> A deep and mellow dye,
> Which scarce the shade of coming eve
> Can banish from the sky,
> Those smiles unto the moodiest mind
> Their own pure joy impart;
> Their sunshine leaves a glow behind
> That lightens o'er the heart—

where we irresistibly want to add:

> My boys,
> That lightens o'er the heart.

The Vision of Belshazzar, on the other hand, is an admirable dramatic lyric, and such things as *The Wild Gazelle* have not become famous for nothing. In these smaller pieces, too, Byron showed again his capacity for writing lines that have survived in spite of their second-rateness:

> The Assyrian came down like a wolf in the fold,
> And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold—

has proved itself to have stamina if it has nothing else. But now and again Byron was finding himself as surely in lyric as he was in narrative and forensic verse:

She walks in Beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
Thus mellowed to that tender light
Which Heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express,
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent.

I had not meant to quote it all, but readers to whom it is familiar will forgive me for asking them to read again a thing so lovely. If Byron had always written—but these speculations are idle. Flaws may be detected in the lyric: I am not sure about the gaudy day, and waves—raven, win—tints, are perhaps, doubtful: but they are nothing. This is great lyric verse as surely as anything that came out of that fertile age.

7

And so our narrative passes from Byron's poetry to the other great emotional ardour of his life. We have to move warily here, disregarding the sentimentalist on the one hand and the cynic on the other. To see Byron's love affairs in the romantic gloom of a devout legend is bad; to see them as a jest that meant little to him and need mean no more to us, is worse. Nor can we afford to be mealy-mouthed about the matter. Love—I propose to indulge no Freudian subtleties of definition—was a constant necessity of Byron's nature. He invented[1] the classic

[1] After Catullus, as Mr. Edward Marsh points out to me.

phrase that it was impossible to live with women or to live without them. The disaster of his personal life was that his love-making was organised with an almost unparalleled stupidity. He blundered from one affair into another and generally with the maximum of loss to everybody concerned. Much more than mere philandering was involved. "There is something," he writes in his journal, "very softening in the presence of a woman—some strange influence, even if one is not in love with them—which I cannot at all account for, having no very high opinion of the sex. But yet—I always feel in better humour with myself, and everything else, if there is a woman within ken." And his own attractiveness is no less indisputable. We may talk about Regency manners, and we may make some discreet allowance for Byron's not very gallant protest that he was more often the courted than the suitor; but there is no disguising the fact that in nearly every case when he was interested the interest was returned with the most ample liberality. "Lord Byron is such a favourite with the ladies," wrote Mrs. Piozzi (Johnson's Mrs. Thrale) when she was seventy, "we all agree he might throw his handkerchief." Don Juan, Lothario, Pan, something of these was inherent in his character, and to lament its presence is to wish for a Byron in other colours than his own. The Countess Guiccioli saw in him a Frenchman nurtured on the murky banks of the Thames. A little precious the figure, perhaps, but not pointless. Byron had not only as a young man travelled Europe, he was by instinct European in a sense not easily comprehensible to Mr. Kipling's islander who only England knows. A youngster who had been at the court of Ali Pasha was apt to match the Regency standards of England to some advantage; but beyond this there was in Byron a strain that would have seemed familiar to Ali without personal acquaintance. By his own code Byron behaved badly enough at times, but we have to recognise the code, or part company with him altogether.

Dallas, as we have remarked, was troubled about Byron after the publication of *Childe Harold*, and not altogether disinterestedly so. His anxiety was relieved when later Byron gave him the valuable copyright of *The Corsair*, but it was very active

for a time, and even the relief proved to be no more than temporary. One day, on making his customary call at St. James's Street, he was pained to find the poet inattentive to his presence. *Childe Harold* had just been published, and among Byron's correspondence was a letter that, according to Dallas, he discovered had come from "a fine young woman, and distinguished for eccentric notions." Whereupon Byron had become "so enraptured, so intoxicated, that his time and thoughts were almost entirely devoted to reading her letters and answering them." On the present occasion Byron was thus occupied in composition, and Dallas, on entering the room, almost escaped his notice. A little humiliated, Dallas took a seat and a newspaper, with "Pray go on," which Byron showed no sign of not doing. As Byron wrote he looked up at intervals, but Dallas was uncomfortably aware of not being seen. At length Dallas rose: "Pray sit," said Byron. Dallas replied that he would return, and "I wish you would" was all he heard as the letter proceeded. Considerably discouraged, Dallas walked out into St. James's Street, convinced that Byron had observed neither his coming nor his going. He feared that the vanities of the world were alienating his young friend from the resolutions of virtue; also from himself. The next day he called again, and took his "usual liberty with him, and honestly warned him against his new dangers." While this work was going forward, another letter from the lady arrived. It was brought by a page, "a fair-faced delicate boy of thirteen or fourteen years old . . . dressed in a scarlet huzzar jacket and pantaloons trimmed in front in much the same manner with silver buttons, and twisted silver lace, with which the narrow slit cuffs of his jacket were also embroidered. He had light hair curling about his face; and held a feathered fancy hat in his hand, which completed the scenic appearance of this urchin Pandarus." Dallas was uneasy; he suspected a disguise. But Byron offered no enlightenment.

The letter was from Lady Caroline Lamb, and Dallas's suspicion may well have been no idle one. If the page was not the lady herself on that occasion, he was on others. Caroline Ponsonby, the daughter of Lord and Lady Bessborough, was at this

time twenty-seven years of age, three years older than Byron. She was married to her cousin William Lamb, who afterwards became Queen Victoria's Lord Melbourne. She was a reigning figure in society, and, to judge from her picture, an extremely attractive one. Known to her friends as "Sprite," "Ariel," "Squirrel," "Cherubina," and other such diminutives, she was something of a privileged madcap in a not very sedate world. Her eager, imprudent, capricious mind kept her from qualifying as a blue-stocking—blue-bottles, as Byron called them. But she had an enthusiasm for literature, and wrote uninspired but ecstatic verses herself. Also she made no pretence of wrestling with her emotions. She had married for love, and at the beginning of 1812, although gossip had paid her some attention, she and her husband after seven years were still on amiable terms. But, on seeing Byron at a party a few days after the publication of *Childe Harold*, she abandoned herself then and there to an infatuation from which she never recovered. She refused to be introduced on this first occasion, and went home instead to record in her diary that Byron was "mad, bad, and dangerous to know." Her action, however, was dictated not by scruple, but by policy. She was not going to allow her impetuosity to spoil her chances. She meant Byron to hear of her refusal, which he did. A few days later they were together again, this time at Holland House. Byron was presented, and she had the satisfaction of being asked why she had declined to meet him before. The next day she was at Melbourne House, talking to Moore and Rogers in her riding habit, when Byron called. She slipped out of the room to get rid of the park mud before seeing him, and on her return Rogers congratulated Byron on having inspired an attention with which himself and Moore had not been favoured. Byron stayed for more than an hour, most of the time nursing Lady Caroline's child, for whom she had sent with a discreet show of domesticity. But turbulent passions were at work, and from that day an intimacy began that for months beat its way through many vicissitudes to a miserable ending.

Byron was a disaster in Caroline Lamb's life, but it is a mis-

take to think of her as a weak, high-spirited victim of his designs. She was a wilful, daring woman, utterly careless of opinion, generous in her aims, but, if put to it, merciless in their pursuit. Byron, we have said, conducted all his love affairs with the greatest possible ineptitude, or perhaps we should say all but one. He was, at his worst, not nearly so much a monster as a fool. And Lady Caroline was a fool also. Together they made as sordid a mess of a devotion as fiction could devise; but my own opinion is that there was for a time between them an essential sympathy such as Byron very rarely experienced. Their natures having a common folly, it was inevitable that the understanding should come speedily to grief; but, while it lasted, I think that it was far deeper than has generally been allowed. Byron's own evidence, recorded in later years by Medwin, is unreliable, as it notoriously was always in such connections. He might sometimes make a formal confession of faith about recollected emotions, as he did once or twice in speaking of Lady Byron, or a sentimental confession, as he did in speaking of the Mary Chaworth of his boyhood. But of any real significance in his amours he hardly ever, after the event, says a word. If he refers to them at all, it is usually in a mood at best of detachment and disillusion. Moreover, in the case of Caroline Lamb he had particular reason for remembering the episode in the most unfavourable light. That things fell out as they did was no doubt as much his fault as hers, but when the end came he found he had to deal with a woman who was at once determined and a bedlamite. When he was talking to Medwin, ten years later, all he was likely to recall of the affair was the succession of outrageous scenes in which it terminated. On such matters Medwin's evidence is doubly insecure, since Byron was likely to be hazing himself as well as his confidant. Caroline Lamb's own evidence is, it seems to me, much more trustworthy. She opened the intrigue on an hysterical note, to which she returned on any or no provocation. She began by writing letters full, as Byron said with far less reason of his own, of "detestable tropes and figures," and panting with a high-flown submission:

Yet the sunflower was punished for its temerity; but its fate is more to be envied than that of many less proud flowers. It is still permitted to gaze, though at the humblest distance, on him who is superior to every other . . . and though it never could, never will, have reason to boast of any peculiar mark of condescension or attention from the bright star to whom it pays constant homage, yet to behold it sometimes, to see it gazed at, to hear it admired, will repay all. She hopes, therefore, when brought by the little Page, it will be graciously received, etc.

This was the recklessness upon which Byron found it necessary to speak firmly within a few weeks of their meeting: "I never knew a woman with greater or more pleasing talents. . . . But these are unfortunately coupled with a total want of common conduct." It was the recklessness that, when finally provoked, could rise to fits of pantherish ferocity. But it was the excess of a temperament that, in repose, must have combined with great physical charm and a discriminating intelligence to appeal to Byron with peculiar force. Ten years later she meant nothing to Byron but an intrigue for which there had been the devil to pay. With her it was another story. After the breach she made the most extravagant profession of hatred, but in reality Byron remained the lodestar of her crazy but rather touching spirit until her end in 1828. When Medwin's book appeared after Byron's death in 1824, she received a copy when she was on what she believed to be her own death-bed. The book contained passages that, true or false, ought certainly never to have been published while she was alive. Without anger, but with deep feeling and a good deal of the old spirit, she wrote to Medwin an account that is convincing and pathetic. She corrects the statements imputed to Byron, also she fills in the picture of their happier moments together, and she is plainly speaking the truth in both respects. After praising Medwin's book in general terms, she tells him of her love-marriage, and says that at the time of her meeting with Byron she was "the happiest and gayest of human beings I do believe without exception . . . my husband and I were so fond of each other that false as I soon proved he never would part with me." William Lamb, in fact, separated from her in 1825, chiefly it seems, in consequence of the revelations of Medwin's book; but

when she died at Melbourne House her husband was with her. Her letter to Medwin proceeds:

> Byron never never could say I had no heart. He never could say, either, that I had not loved my husband. . . . Recall those words, and let me not go down with your book as heartless. Tell the truth; it is bad enough; but not what is worse. . . . I was not a woman of the world. Had I been one of that sort, why would he have devoted nine entire months almost entirely to my society; have written perhaps ten times a day. . . . Byron did not affect —but he loved me as never woman was loved. . . . Besides he was then very good, to what he grew afterwards; and, his health being delicate, he liked to read with me and stay with me out of the crowd. Not but what we went about everywhere together, and were at last invited always as if we had been married. . . .

The writer, in her recollections, has bridged the angry and tempestuous days that followed her early intimacy with Byron; but the intimacy itself is here presented to us with all the appearance of truth. There are exaggerations—the nine months, for instance —and the document, from which this is but a brief extract, is characteristically over-pitched in style, but the old violences are subdued, and we have no reason now to doubt the essential veracity of a woman who thought she was making her last testament. Medwin himself believed her; or, in any case, he suppressed the offending passages in the third edition of his book, which appeared within a few months of the first.

Of Byron's letters to Caroline Lamb only four have been preserved, and of these, two alone belong to the short period of their concord. It is in one of them that he warns her against indiscretions, but he wishes her heart, volcanic as it is, not a degree colder, and he informs her that she is "the cleverest, most agreeable, absurd, amiable, perplexing, dangerous, fascinating, little being that lives now, or ought to have lived 2,000 years ago." For beauty, he is no judge, "but our beauties cease to be so when near you." He tells her that this is the first and last compliment of the kind that he proposes to pay her, but assures her that all that she can say he feels. In the meantime, tiresome as prudence is, they must observe it. The idiom is light enough, but the motif is plainly responsive to her own more voluble passion. The

other of these two letters is concerned only with a matter to be mentioned a little later. Nor does Byron elsewhere refer to Lady Caroline in his correspondence, until he begins to do so with growing violence as the romance draws to a close. But that from March to the end of June or so romance it was, and a romance of deep currents, there is little doubt. Caroline's ardour, however, soon began to decline into importunity, which Byron could never stand. He could not join a company in her presence without being treated as a possession. Moreover, two great houses might view a daughter's intrigue with composure, but they could not afford to have her making herself publicly ridiculous. She was also making Byron look ridiculous, than which nothing could have been more injurious to her prospects of keeping her hold on him. However happy the relations between them may have been for a time, "out of the crowd," people began to laugh as they saw him in public doing no better, as they construed it, than dance attendance on her affectations. The romance was becoming an entanglement, and he prepared to get free of it; which turned out to be a much more formidable process than he had anticipated. Lady Caroline's people also decided that something must be done. She was living with her husband's family at Melbourne House, and early in August her mother, Lady Bessborough, called to propose that she should retire from London for a time, paying a visit to Ireland with William Lamb and herself. Lord Melbourne joined the conference, but, having expostulated with his daughter-in-law on her behaviour, which was, he said, becoming intolerable, he withdrew. Caroline thereupon flew into a rage, and set about her mother to such purpose as to cause her to rush out of the room calling for Lady Melbourne's help. Lady Melbourne, more composed we may be sure than the others, appeared at once, but Caroline had vanished from the house. Greatly upset, Lady Bessborough resourcefully told the coachman to drive her up and down the street; but, having waited some time in vain for her daughter's return, she went back into the house, to learn that Caroline had threatened that, if she was persecuted, she would fly to Lord Byron, and that Lord Melbourne had told her to fly and be damned.

The patrician mothers set off together in pursuit, it not being recorded that Lord Melbourne accompanied them. One account says that Caroline had gone to Byron's house, forced herself into his room, and entreated him to take her away; another that she had taken refuge with a surgeon in Kensington, where Byron eventually found her by bribing a coachman. In either case he persuaded her to return to Melbourne House, and, Lady Bessborough having been found in a fit at the bottom of her carriage, there was a scene of general reconciliation. But Byron's nerves could not stand romance at this rate, and the incident, although it by no means closed the chapter, removed from it any harmony that there may have been. Caroline went off with her parents and a condoning husband to Ireland, but before departing she received a remarkable letter from Byron. What the explanation of this letter is can, I think, never finally be known. It is almost certain that, before this crisis occurred, Lady Caroline's exactions were trying Byron to the point at least of inclining him to break with her, and after its occurrence we cannot doubt that the purpose became fixed. And yet the letter is written in terms of the most unequivocal devotion. His agitation on that distressing evening will have shown her, if proof were needed, what his emotions towards her are. Considerately but decisively he makes it clear that he looks upon their connection as at an end, but he protests an undiminished affection. "When I quit you, or rather you, from a sense of duty to your husband and mother, quit me, you shall acknowledge the truth of what I again promise and vow, that no other in word or deed, shall ever hold the place in my affections, which is and shall be, most sacred to you, till I am nothing. I never knew till *that moment* the *madness* of my dearest and most beloved friend." And again, "Do you think now I am *cold* and *stern* and *artful?* . . . Will your mother ever—that mother to whom we must indeed sacrifice much, more, much more on my part than she shall ever know or can imagine?" He proceeds to say that if it had been possible nothing could have so contented him as to have made her his long ago, and that he feels this more than ever at the present time. He cares not who knows it, and, if he refrains, are his motives to be misunderstood?

And finally, "I was and am yours freely and most entirely, to obey, to honour, love,—and fly with you when, where, and how you yourself *might* and may determine."

Moore does not print this letter; indeed, he tells us nothing of the episode. Lord Ernle publishes it as from the Murray MSS., but it appeared in *The Real Lord Byron* by John Cordy Jeaffreson, in 1883. I have wondered whether it might not be a forgery by Lady Caroline herself; we know from a subsequent incident that she was able to imitate Byron's handwriting perfectly. But that she could sustain his style so successfully at length is unlikely, and, in the absence of anything but vague surmise to the contrary, we must accept the authenticity of the letter. But it is a perplexing document. That Byron for a time was deeply in love with Caroline Lamb we may believe, but we know that within a month of this letter he was writing to Lady Melbourne, with whom at this time he began an amazing correspondence, stating his determination to have nothing further to do with an affair that had wasted his time and destroyed all his plans for the best part of a year. We know, too, that with every fresh overture from the other side his resolution became more stony. But when he wrote this letter to Caroline it is incredible that he should have made such avowals without feeling them, for no purpose. If, as we suppose, his intention so far as it concerned himself was to take advantage of a clear-cut occasion to say that, fond as they had been, it was now necessary to make an end of their relationship, he could clearly have done it without committing himself so immoderately. The inference is that he had some purpose beyond this intention, and I am inclined to think that Jeaffreson pointed to a right conclusion. Chivalry towards women was not generally Byron's strong point, but for once it seems that he should be credited with a very handsome display of it. He did a good deal, under extreme provocation it is true, to diminish that credit by his behaviour afterwards; but the letter in question can only be explained by attributing to him at the time a motive that was extremely honourable. There is no doubt that his emotions were deeply touched, not only on his own account, but also, and more poignantly, by the very real distress of the woman who

had for a time meant a great deal to him. He realised, at the moment, that she was very badly shaken; he realised, further, that when the storm had blown over, her position would be a very unenviable one if people chose to say that she had been cast off; so he set himself to provide her with evidence against such an emergency, and did it very thoroughly. It was one of Byron's merits, although he could be petulant, like most authors, under criticism, to be really courageous about uninstructed public opinion, and he did as he considered right on this occasion without any thought of the consequences to himself. He wanted Caroline Lamb to be able to say, if it suited her, that she had made the decision herself, and that he was a suppliant to the last; as it did so suit her when, years later, she told Medwin that the cause of their parting was that "my dearest Mother, now dead, grew so terrified about us—that, upon hearing a false report that we were gone off together she was taken dangerously ill. . . . Byron would not believe it, but it was true. When he was convinced, we parted." But not, Medwin was informed, until after he had "press'd me to leave all and go with him." The letter is an unusual but impressive tribute to Byron's generosity.

8

Once it was written, however, and Caroline safely in Ireland, Byron began to turn his attention elsewhere. Not that she was quite so safely in Ireland after all, as he was very soon to learn. But the enlightenment, when it came, finally subdued any tenderness that may have been left in that direction, and the more fully released his fancy to play where it would. For the moment he was without any clear purpose, but new attachments were already insinuating themselves into his mind. They were shadowy at present, but some preference could be relied upon to assert itself. One early spring evening in 1812, Byron accompanied Moore to a party in London. Medwin, who is our informant, says merely that it was at Lady ——'s, and it may very well have been at one of Byron's first visits to Melbourne House after

his introduction to Lady Caroline, from whom one of his letters to Moore conveys an invitation for the evening of March 26th. Byron frightened himself by falling upstairs, telling Moore that it was a bad omen. Among the guests was a quiet young woman, "more simply dressed than the rest of the assembly, sitting alone upon a sofa." She was, it seemed to Byron, pretty in a retired and modest way that contrasted notably with her surroundings, and, with "the fairest skin imaginable," and "a perfect figure for her height"; she interested him, as he says, exceedingly. Her name was Anna Isabella Milbanke, and she was the daughter of Sir Ralph and Lady Milbanke, and, her father being Lady Melbourne's brother, she was Caroline Lamb's cousin by marriage. She was now just twenty years of age. Byron may have been interested, but a few months later, when Caroline seems to have sent him some of Miss Milbanke's poems—whether or not at the author's request we do not know—he is writing without enthusiasm. The verses are well enough; it is indeed surprising to find so much strength and variety under so placid a countenance. Were it necessary, or even proper, which it is not, for Miss Milbanke to indulge her talent, it would doubtless lead to distinction. But he has no desire for Miss Milbanke's better acquaintance; "she is too good for a fallen spirit to know, and I should like her more if she were less perfect." Possibly the conclusion of the letter was designed for Caroline's own edification; possibly, also, the opening, with its guarded but not unhandsome compliments about the verses, Byron assumed might agreeably be shown to Miss Milbanke, which would account for the formality of "My dear Lady Caroline." What the cousins thought of each other is chiefly conjectural, but Annabella, as she was called, is said to have spoken of Caroline as "Beautiful Silliness," and to have told her on one occasion that her affectation of Byronic melancholy spoilt the charm of her stupidity. Caroline may be trusted to have effected a suitable exchange of opinion. In any case, the younger woman cannot have failed to be aware of the other's interest in the poet, and as she was from the first not wholly without some curiosity on her own account, there was no doubt a cousinly vigilance between them.

"High-principled," "cold," "formality," "a strong sense of duty," "natural refinement," "proud purity," "the impersonation of conscience," such are the expressions that cluster round the accounts of Miss Milbanke, even in her girlhood. What the nature they suggest became in later years we have seen. When Byron first saw her, virtue and prudence were close deliberations in her mind; an icicle, one observer called her bluntly. But she had attractions, and Byron felt them. She seems to have had no remarkable beauty; but she had appearance, manner. With a liberal and sensitive taste in literature, she could form clear opinions on what she read, and did not chatter about it. But, when she did talk, she talked well. A cool, unspectacular young woman, of whom other young women were a little afraid while they laughed at her. Moreover, she was, elisionally, different. She had her own imperfections, and tragic ones they proved to be in her maturity. But in these days, without being a figure, she yet had a quality by which she was distinguished. Miss Milbanke was the sort of person before whom the peculiar laxity of Regency morals would become suddenly self-conscious. She was probably aware of this herself; may even have tried to accommodate her nature to a code with which it was, for all its composure, ill at ease. Although she was to become a moral bigot, there is no reason to suppose that in her later girlhood she was a prig, and her demureness and her aspiration towards a tolerance that she did not feel were alike in their plain sincerity. But, to an astute perception, they made her character something of a problem, they presented her as encountering rather unusual stresses of experience, and Byron's was such a perception. When he said that she interested him exceedingly, he was no doubt conscious of some such rarity of appeal. Caroline's emotions were generous and demonstrative, but, as we have said, she did not wrestle with them. Miss Milbanke's were chary and impenetrable it might be; but there were signs of conflict. The distinction would be registered in Byron's mind. And when, a little later, Caroline began to fuss, the reserve of this enigmatic girl would acquire a new force. Byron might profess indifference. He was accustomed to succeed, and there was no assurance of success in

this quarter; so that it was wiser to risk nothing. But his attention was engaged.

9

Two other acquaintances were beginning to exercise an influence on Byron during the summer of 1812. One was Elizabeth, Viscountess Melbourne, who at this time was sixty years old. She had been a great beauty, and was still a leader of Whig society. What she did not know about the world of fashion was not worth knowing, and she applied her knowledge with a wit and judgment that were proverbial. She liked character to be emphatic, even though it was not irreproachable, and she knew uncommon talents when she saw them. Byron, therefore, was easily established in her favour, and her privileged position made her an invaluable ally for him. At the height of his success, he needed no social patronage, but to be on terms with Lady Melbourne was more than worth anybody's while; and in her discreet but lavish standards of conduct he found an encouraging security. Her widely practised wisdom invited his confidences; how astonishingly they were given and taken will be seen. They genuinely liked each other. The thirty years between them kept any intimacy out of the danger zone, but there was a common instinct sufficiently strong to lend just a touch of romance to a familiarity that was beyond the risk of staling. A few years younger, Byron said, and she could if she liked have made a complete fool of him. When he was most heavily involved in his intrigues, he wrote to her, "Why won't *you* go off with me? I am sure our elopement would have a greater effect . . . than any event of the kind, since Eve ran away with the apple." The note of this is perfectly in keeping with her own humorous sense, but on one occasion at least they adopted a graver tone. Byron had written in terms of serious and respectful admiration, regretting that the fracas with Caroline Lamb might prevent the improvement of an acquaintance he so highly cherished. Lady Melbourne replied, "If circumstances should not stop it entirely, our Friendship will be very pleasant to both, as any sentiment

PLATE VII

Stewardson
1

Wageman
2

Artist unknown
3

A. W. Devis
4

Hoppner
5

Lawrence
6

1. MRS. BYRON (The Poet's Mother)
2. AUGUSTA LEIGH
3. MARY CHAWORTH
4. LADY FRANCES WEBSTER
5. LADY MELBOURNE
6. LADY BLESSINGTON

must be where all is sunshine—and, where love does not introduce itself, there can be no jealousies, torments, and quarrels. . . . Once you told me you did not understand Friendship. I told you I would teach it you, and so I will, if you do not allow C. to take you quite away." The friendship took rather an eccentric turn at times, but it was a close and remarkable one. And, with Byron already in deep waters with her daughter-in-law, and at the same time not quite unaware of the attractions of her niece, she had especial reasons at the time for observing him with more than a casual interest.

On September 28th Byron, writing from Cheltenham, told two correspondents that among the only people whom he knows left in the town are the Oxfords. This refers to Edward Harley, the fifth Earl of Oxford, and his wife, Jane Elizabeth. His lordship has been neglected by history, but Lady Oxford was somewhat maliciously celebrated in her own time, and has taken her place in Byron's story. She was born in 1774, and was therefore nearly forty during the time of Byron's intimacy with her. She was, in her way, as much a character as Caroline Lamb, but it was a different way. "There could not," said an acquaintance of some standing, "be a more ill-matched pair than herself and Lord Oxford." Her husband seems to have commended himself to no one as a suitable object of esteem or affection, least of all to his wife. The daughter of a Hampshire clergyman, she was married, without her own choice, at the age of twenty. When she was twenty-four she was painted by Hoppner, and we see a woman of striking but already disillusioned beauty. When Byron met her she had long since ceased to direct her life by a regard for reputation. Warm-hearted and with an accommodating will, she kept what hold she had on her friends in a stormy career by real tenderness and amiability, rather than any display of principle. But her numerous traducers found ample scope for their gifts, and they used it. And in her case there was no indulgence in the censure. Lady Caroline could ask a young man in public whether he knew how many pairth of thilk thtockingth she had on, and be amusing; but there was no extenuating lisp in Lady Oxford's character. Hers were not the licensed vagaries of caprice;

they were the expression of a deliberate policy, and were judged accordingly. When she appeared at parties with an Irish adventurer who had become one of Napoleon's generals, no one excused her; for she was either accepted without excuse, or anathematised. Hobhouse summarises the position in a delightful entry in his diary for June 24th, 1812: "Dined at Lord Oxford's. . . . Lady Oxford most uncommon in her talk, and licentious—uncommonly civil." Civilly licentious, and take it or leave it. When she died, the friend above quoted (Sir Uvedale Price, a gardening stylist of the Natural-Picturesque school) recording her "kindness to those she loved, whether as friends or lovers," adds prudently—though he was nearly thirty years her senior: "As a friend, I always found her the same, never at all changed or capricious. As I am not a very rigid moralist, and am extremely open to kindness, I could have better spared a better woman." But, kind as she might be, and submissive to congenial influences, she could prove a stubborn and dangerous adversary, as Lady Caroline was soon to know.

These, then, were the women who in their several ways made their impression upon Byron's life during the two years and a half preceding his marriage: the great patroness of liberal society, infinitely tolerant and candid, shrewd with the limited vision of shrewdness, aged sixty; the rather tragically instructed but still impetuous matron, her charm at least unfaded, no longer concerned even to challenge an opinion that she did not fear, aged forty or so; the volatile heroine of polite scandal, something under thirty; and the determined, pretty, incalculable pedant of twenty. Yet a fifth, Lady Frances Webster, was to assert herself, but she does not belong to the immediate moment. And always, at some varying and indefinite point in the perspective, is the figure of Augusta Leigh; but it may be noted here that the records of 1812 are wholly silent concerning her. Byron was seeing his sister, we may be sure, but we have nothing of their correspondence, nor is she mentioned in his journal or elsewhere.

10

Caroline Lamb left England for Ireland early in September. Byron, having made his *beau geste*, at once realised how consoling her departure was. On the 10th he writes to Lady Melbourne that she will not be sorry to hear that Caroline and her mother are safely deposited in Ireland; he really means that he himself is enchanted to hear it. He adds, "I wish this [the liaison] to end, and it certainly shall not be renewed on my part." He has been a fool as usual, but it is over, and let them waste no more words on the topic. A very sagacious resolution, but he was reckoning without his Caroline. Three days later the overture has begun. Caroline has written to say that, if he shakes her confidence, eight guineas, a mail, and a packet can immediately bring her to London. The warning makes him resolve to write her every kind of amiability to keep her quiet, and he has already begun to act upon the resolution. Then he abruptly tells Lady Melbourne that they have all been mistaken as to his real sentiments. He is attached to another, one whom he would wish to marry if he received any encouragement, and if he could honourably disentangle himself from his present folly. The object of his ambition is, astonishingly, Miss Milbanke. He has little if any hope, but there is his confession. Can Lady Melbourne help him? Probably not—but his gratitude would be boundless.

The Protean agility of Byron's moods during the following months may well strain the closest vigilance, but with the information that we have it should not succeed in outwitting us. Startling as we might suppose Byron's declaration to have been to Lady Melbourne, she was not in the least disconcerted by it. Indeed, what is as surprising as the declaration itself, she promoted it. She may not have realised the length to which Byron's emotion had led him in the letter to Caroline of less than a month before; she no doubt also knew, without being told, that during the affair with her daughter-in-law he might soberly have been charged with "want of gallantry . . . if I had played the Scipio on this occasion"; and she may have accepted in good faith his assurance that he was now heartily anxious to be rid of the whole

business. But, when he first consulted her thus momentously about her niece, she was actively aware at least that he had been seriously involved with Caroline, and was by no means yet clear of the scandal. It has been suggested that Lady Melbourne felt that the best way of smoothing out the difficulty with Caroline was to get Byron safely married into the family, when the intrigue, if it continued, would have less public attraction. This is to ascribe more than her due share of cynicism even to Lady Melbourne, and further to tax her with a credulity that certainly was not hers. But we can understand Jeaffreson's invention of even so unlikely a motive in the circumstances. The more probable explanation is the plain one that Lady Melbourne was not at all scandalised by the scandal, and saw in Byron an attractive, indeed, a brilliant match for her niece. With in any case a shrewd suspicion as to the full facts of the case, she told Byron that, in her opinion, they exculpated him entirely—the phrase is her own—with regard to Caroline. For ourselves we may question this or not as we like, but there is no doubt that Lady Melbourne believed it. But to believe him exculpated was not to believe him clear of a mischievous embarrassment, and her action remains sufficiently odd. On receiving Byron's communication, she wrote to Annabella, casually enquiring, with no particular context, what were the qualities she would desire in a husband. Annabella replied at once, and dutifully. As she has a temper that is easily provoked, she would like a man who could habitually control his own; when she is sure she would be as agreeable as could be wished. "He must have consistent principles of Duty governing strong and *generous* feelings, and reducing them under the command of Reason." Genius she does not demand, but would accept it if united with these other qualities. His affection must be equable, not susceptible to caprice in either direction. He is to consult her, but not invest her with too much responsibility. He need not be wealthy, but must have enough to maintain her in her present station. Rank does not matter, but good connections are to be desired. She does not regard beauty, but must covenant for the manners of a gentleman. There must be no insanity in his family. Lady Melbourne was encouraged, and pursued the

enquiry. Annabella explains that, so far from insisting on perfection, she has purposely omitted several demands that her instinct would prompt her to make. She realises her own failings, and only wishes them to be corrected. Disclaiming any preference for *dry* Reason and *cold* Rectitude, she reaffirms the necessity of Principles founded on a sense of religion, and they must be *consistent* and *fixed*. What possessed Lady Melbourne, after this, to suppose that Byron's suit was a proper one to advance we cannot say; but so it was.

Caroline continued her fusillade from Ireland, and Byron continued his protests to Lady Melbourne. Not that the protests indicated that fixed and consistent character that Annabella so much commended. In one and the same letter, dated September 18th, Byron says that, while he cannot swear he is sure of himself about Miss Milbanke, he submits his misgivings with confidence to Lady Melbourne's better judgment, which he is relieved to know is favourable. He then returns to Caroline, and confuses us by saying that if all attempts to extricate them both from the present situation should fail, and it is after all decreed that he "must be hers, she shall be mine, as long as it pleases her, and the circumstances under which she becomes so will at least make me devote my life to the vain attempt of reconciling her to herself. Wretched as it would render me, she should never know it; the sentence once past, I could never restore that which she had lost, but all the reparation I could make should be made, and the cup drained to the very dregs by myself, so that its bitterness passed from her."[1] Three days later Caroline has asked him whether he could live without her, and he has torn up the only answer he could devise. She also is taking part in amateur theatricals, and professes some reviving interest in her husband, William Lamb. Byron is glad to hear of anything that may keep her attentions from himself, but the respite is momentary. At the same time his candidature for Miss Milbanke's

[1] There is a curious ambiguity about this passage. By a complete manipulation of syntax, construction, and sense, it might be made to apply to Annabella. But as it stands the reference is plainly to Caroline, and this is the less unlikely of two improbabilities. That he should write so at this stage about Caroline is strange enough; but that he should have written so about Annabella is scarcely credible.

hand is spoken of as a settled project, other difficulties having apparently been dismissed though not solved. Negotiations extended from September 13th, when, as we have seen, Byron first spoke of the matter to Lady Melbourne, until October 12th, when they were terminated, in what manner will be shown directly. The events of that month compose themselves into a sublime fantasia. At first Byron, uncertain as to how his suggestion will be received by Lady Melbourne; and with Byron, Caroline. Then Byron, Lady Melbourne favourably inclined, and sounding Annabella; and still Caroline. Then, on the 25th, Annabella acquainted with Byron's proposal, not by the suitor himself but by her aunt, and saying that she must have time to consider it; in which interval Byron announces that he is "verging towards" an opera singer, whose acquaintance he has made at Cheltenham, who requires neither time nor "all the cardinal virtues," and who would save him the trouble of getting married by herself being married already. Then, on October 12th, came Annabella's answer. She is very sensible of the honourable nature of Lord Byron's wishes; she could not dismiss them without the most careful deliberation; the little she knows of him confirms her aunt's good opinion, but she is convinced that she could find no domestic happiness with him, and, with every assurance of grateful esteem, she feels it her duty to decline the "very uncommon advantages now offered." Lady Melbourne, in conveying this decision to Byron, hoped that he would not think it sufficient cause for dropping friendly relations with her niece; Annabella herself did not desire that. Byron was prompt in his assurances; they would be better friends than ever; Annabella was right from every point of view, and they would agree never to refer to the incident again. That was on October 17th, and on the same day he says that he has been asked to stay with the Oxfords. On the 18th he thinks he shall accept the invitation, on the 20th he means, "*entre nous*, my dear Machiavel," to play off Lady Oxford against Caroline, who is still indefatigable, and on the 24th he sets off for Eywood, the Oxfords' house in Herefordshire.

The cool jet of Annabella's common sense sobered the extravaganza for a time, or one theme of it at least; though neither Lady Melbourne nor Byron seems to have been aware of anything unusual in any aspect of the situation. If Annabella had remained of her first mind, much coming misery might have been spared. But she did not; she was even but very uncertainly of that mind at all, and, as for Byron, airily as he might take the refusal, it was a challenge that settled obscurely into his consciousness with a world of fatally realised promise. But of this he was himself unaware at the time, and he addressed himself to other matters.

How well Byron knew Lady Oxford before his first visit to Eywood is not clear, but we may suppose that it was well enough to make him believe that his attentions would not be displeasing. However that may be, within a week of his arrival an intimacy was established that was, Byron afterwards told Medwin, continued without interruption for eight months. Lady Oxford's beauty was no longer virginal, as we have seen; but Byron, in after-years, remembers her "autumnal charms" with unfeigned tenderness and in favourable contrast to the spring of others. Lady Blessington reports him as saying: "I once found it necessary to call up all that could be said in favour of matured beauty, when my heart became captive to a donna of forty-six, who certainly excited as lively a passion in my breast as ever it has known." Lady Blessington gives no name, and Byron is eight years on the wrong side of generosity in the question of age, but the passage cannot have referred to any one but Lady Oxford. Clearly what happened is that Byron, distracted by Caroline's shrill persistency, found in Lady Oxford a tranquillising companion and a firm counsellor. Her ladyship's eccentricities were reserved for public display rather than for her private intimacies. When her affair with Byron was over and she was, as Hobhouse tells us, exciting the gossip of Naples by arriving half an hour late for dinner with the king and queen, and putting her arm over the queen's shoulder to shake hands with his majesty, she was rash enough to go about exhibiting Byron's picture in her

girdle. But in the autumn of 1812 she was a sedative to his jangled nerves, and greatly to his relief she took control of a predicament that was exhausting him. Byron's first visit lasted a month, and two or three times a week progress was duly reported from his asylum to Lady Melbourne. On October 30th he announces that he is "certainly very much enchanted," and indicates the course of events with "I am sick of scenes, and have imbibed a taste for something like *quiet*." And on November 4th he has written to Caroline to say that he is now "deeply and seriously engaged elsewhere." He has already taken a house near Eywood in order to be in the neighbourhood next year; and, again, "all our wishes tend to quiet." Altogether, we are informed, the situation is much more to his taste than the "Annabella scheme."

Caroline's letters continued to arrive in undiminished profusion; but Byron's mood is stiffening under the new influence. He is passing his time in quiet, and he will no longer submit to these caprices. That is to say, Lady Oxford will not submit to them, for she too is now engaging Caroline's epistolary attentions. November 9th, if we may accept the date given by Caroline to Medwin, marked the first decisive step. A new letter to Lady Oxford, "containing a number of *unanswerable* questions," tripped Byron out of his irony and his temper, and he told Lady Melbourne that Caroline is "the most contradictory, absurd, selfish, and contemptibly wicked of human productions." It also persuaded Lady Oxford that, whoever had been to blame, the situation had now become thoroughly unwholesome for everybody concerned, and that further temporising would be nothing but folly. She accordingly caused Byron to write the letter a version of which Caroline printed with fictitious names in her novel, *Glenarvon*. The original text, as recorded by Caroline herself, is given by Lady Airlie[1]:

LADY CAROLINE,

Our affections are not in our power—mine are engaged. I love another—were I inclined to reproach you I might for 20 thousand things, but I will not. They really are not the cause of my present conduct—my opinion of you is entirely alter'd,

[1] *In Whig Society*, 1775-1818, p. 151. 1921.

PLATE VIII

Artist unknown
1

Hoppner
2

Hayter
3

Amelia Curran
4

D'Orsay
5

1. LADY CAROLINE LAMB
2. LADY OXFORD
3. LADY BYRON
4. CLARE CLAIRMONT
5. THE COUNTESS GUICCIOLI

and, if I had wanted anything to confirm me, your levities, your caprices, and the mean subterfuges . . . would entirely have open'd my eyes. I am no longer your lover . . . it would be too dishonourable for me to name her to whom I am now entirely devoted and attached.

The style still bears the marks of Caroline's transcribing hand, but that this is substantially the letter that was written there is no reason to doubt. It was drastic, but Lady Oxford was right in determining that milder measures were useless. Not that the front of brass produced much effect; Caroline asserted that the letter broke her heart, but it did not stem her assiduity.

Lady Oxford's ascendency was, for the time being, complete. Caroline suggested a friendly meeting; Lady Oxford was sensibly of the opinion that, for a time at least, total separation was the only thing, so that Byron has no choice in the matter, and he shall "certainly not waver an instant between the two." He has, in short, promised that "he will not on any account consent to such an interview." The tension of months has been suddenly relaxed, and he is all amenableness to his deliverer. On Sunday, November 14th, he decides that he must leave on the next day, as, if he stays much longer, Lord Oxford "may be seized with crotchets"; but he opens the letter to add that Lady Oxford wishes him to remain for a few days, and so he remains. Everything, he tells Lady Melbourne in his astonishing confessional, "goes on *sans peur* and *sans reproche*, yet very unlike Bayard for all that." He is enjoying the beautiful Herefordshire scenery, putting on weight—not so satisfactory, this—and reading and playing with the children, one of whom was Lady Charlotte Harley, then aged eleven, to whom as Ianthe he addressed the dedication added to the seventh edition of *Childe Harold* (I-II). In a word, "*we* are very quiet, and wish to remain so as much as C. and *others* may permit, yet *we* are also determined . . . not to relinquish a single right which devolves to the conquerors on such occasions." Byron, it will be observed, is not always very gracious in his terms, but was spending at Eywood unfamiliarly gracious days. If his affair with Caroline Lamb in its unspoilt moments had, as we suspect, sounded a more than common

depth of feeling, his affair with Lady Oxford was certainly the most genial of his adventures.

From Eywood Byron went to Middleton, to stay with Lord and Lady Jersey, and thence to London, whither also the Lamb-Bessborough faction had returned. Byron, however, had promised not to see Caroline "without permission," and, after a further altercation, via Lady Melbourne, this time about the return of letters and trinkets, he sent Caroline's back to her and bade her do what she liked with his own, and retreated once more to Eywood late in December, this time to stay some three weeks. Again they "are all very happy and serene—no scenes—good cheer—spirits and temper—and every day convinces one of the *contrast*." The Oxfords are talking of a trip to Sicily in the spring, and he is to be of the party. Lady Melbourne seems to have taken fright at this project, Byron's note in his next letter, "I shall certainly attend to what you say on travelling 'en famille,'" clearly being a response to some warning.[1] Since we know that Lady Oxford liked Lady Melbourne, it is not improbable that Lady Melbourne liked Lady Oxford. But Lady Melbourne's real interest was in Byron, and, while she was pleased enough that he should be kept quiet, she had no fancy for seeing him drop from one public scandal into another, and just now favoured prudence. If Byron chose to go and stay with friends in Herefordshire, it was nobody's business but his own; but if he set off to Sicily—still in those days a somewhat spectacular undertaking—in attendance on a family as little known for domestic devotion as the Oxfords, it might become everybody's. Or so, no doubt, Lady Melbourne saw it. She was all for intrigues, but also all for privacy. In consequence of her advice, however, she began to be suspected at Eywood, in spite of her popularity, of exercising undue influence; which Byron cheerfully admits she does. But other cautionary fingers were being lifted. If Lady Melbourne had her eyes on Lady Oxford, Lord Oxford's family had theirs on Byron. "Lord O. had a

[1] Since the appearance, in 1922, of Byron's letters to Lady Melbourne we can realise how great a loss to Byron biography has been the destruction of her letters to him; and the more so by the two or three examples that Lady Airlie has been able to recover and publish.

long sermon [on the situation generally] from his mother and *maiden* sisters yesterday, who are all as old as Owen Glendower, and have lived out of the world since Henry 4th's reign."

Through the first six months of 1813 Caroline's passion kept a gusty course, closely observed by Lady Oxford, squall succeeding calm in fitful succession. In December 1812 Caroline burnt Byron in effigy, immolating his letters and keepsakes to a crazy incantation of her own composition. In January she forged the letter purporting to be from Byron to Murray, with which she secured a portrait of the poet from Albemarle Street, whither the publishing business had lately been removed from Fleet Street. The occasion of the letter is trifling, but the letter itself, which is a remarkable piece of forgery, as may be seen from the facsimile in Mr. Murray's edition of Byron's letters, 1922, is a sign that its author was to be abashed by nothing when the mood was on her. She continued to demand a meeting, and early in May Lady Oxford thought at last that it had better be allowed. The intelligence departments had been busy, and in March Byron had to reassure Lady Melbourne that, if Lady Oxford had spoken of her in the way that is reported, it would have been the end of his acquaintance with one whom he certainly likes "better than anything on earth." But now in May the three of them are in conference as to the projected meeting. At first it was thought well that a third party should be present, at one time Lady Melbourne being suggested, then Lady Oxford herself. On April 29th Byron wrote to Caroline saying that if she insists on seeing him he will do as she wishes, but warning her that no satisfaction can come of it; and, as she threatens violence, it will be as well for them to meet alone. On May 7th, however, still protesting against meeting Caroline at all as it must end in "some ludicrous scene," he told Lady Melbourne that she must be present. The actual date of the meeting is uncertain, but it seems to have taken place without a witness some time before May 26th, when Byron writes to Lady Melbourne, "C. tells you I said, etc., etc., etc. To be sure I did—and I will say as much more, and as much more to that, to any woman whatever who puts the same questions—who would dare say *No* within arm's length?" As he

had written on the 24th, "All my epistles to y^e^ C. must go for nothing. . . . I must say *yes*, *yes*, *yes* (like a crier in a country town), to keep her quiet," we may suppose that Byron and Caroline met on the 25th. The only account of the occasion, beyond Byron's note to Lady Melbourne just given, is in Caroline's letter to Medwin in 1824. "In due time Lady Melbourne and my mother, being seriously alarmed for me . . . allowed me to see Lord Byron. Our meeting was not what he insinuates—he asked me to forgive him; he looked sorry for me; he cried. I adored him still, but I felt as passionless as the dead may feel." Whatever may have happened, Lady Melbourne and Lady Oxford are agreed in June that there must be no more interviews. Caroline, however, says that they continued occasionally to meet, and we know of at least one dismal collision.

It is necessary to follow the movements of these midsummer months rather closely, for it is now that the relationship is alleged to have begun upon which has been founded the scandal of a century. At the end of March 1813 Byron had written to his sister, thus resuming a correspondence of which there has been no trace since September 1811. And the letter makes it clear that they had not seen anything of each other for a considerable time. Byron apologises for having left a letter from Augusta so long unanswered, but he has waited in the hope of being able to send better news. His prospects about Newstead have failed, however, and he therefore is unable to offer her the relief that she so much needs. He then tells her that she must not be surprised to hear that he has been engaged with "different *regnantes*," as he has but one relative, and her he never sees. He adds that he has spoken twice in the last session, that he has got out of a serious scrape with a "singular personage," and that he is going to stay with the Oxfords. In short, she is many months at least out of date with his affairs. We hear no more of Augusta until June.

In April Byron had been at Eywood again, for something less than a month. On his return to London there are signs that the Oxford influence is waning. In the middle of May he hears that Lady Oxford has burst a small blood-vessel. He suspects that it may be a ruse to take him back to Herefordshire; but, if

not, the illness, although it may be painful for a time, "would eventually be a great relief to *both*." On April 22nd he had been still of a mind to join the Oxfords in Sicily, travelling independently; but it is clear that he was decided against it finally by May 26th, when he writes: "Lady Oxford arrives in town to-morrow, which I regret—when people have once fairly parted." Although when they did actually part we know that Byron felt it a good deal more than he had expected—he felt more "Carolinish" about Lady Oxford than he could have supposed possible—the observation means that, while she was still closely in his counsels about Caroline, Lady Oxford was beginning to be a less immediate necessity to his comfort. On June 3rd (to Hanson) and on June 8th (to Lady Melbourne) Byron was still talking of going abroad, but in what direction we are not told. He informs Lady Melbourne on the latter date that he is in process of seeing the Oxford party off from Portsmouth, and that until he himself leaves he will be but little in London, as among other things he must see his sister; so that he was then proposing to visit the Leighs at Six Mile Bottom, near Newmarket. On the 26th he is expecting Augusta in London, and writes to her to let him know the time and place of her arrival. Whether or not he actually went to Six Mile Bottom in the meantime is not recorded, but internal evidence makes it unlikely that he did. The Oxfords were staying near Maidenhead awaiting embarkation at Portsmouth, and his letters at the time, although most of them give no address, make it reasonably certain that he was with them from the 9th to the 21st, when he was back in London and expecting to return to Portsmouth almost at once to see them sail. Augusta's decision to come to London, however, suddenly changed his plans. In the letter of the 26th, already mentioned, he tells Augusta that he has put off a journey into the country in order to meet her; on the same day or the next he adds, "if you knew *whom* I had put off besides my journey—you would think me grown strangely fraternal." On the 27th he sends her an invitation for a party that evening at Sir Humphry Davy's. On the 29th, he tells Lady Melbourne that Lady Oxford has sailed yesterday; and asks his monitor not to mention her name again while he is in

England, as he is feeling the parting more than he likes; he says that Augusta's visit has at the last moment prevented his going to Portsmouth, and on July 1st he asks Lady Melbourne for a "*she* voucher" to a masque at Almack's to which he wants to take his sister.

At the beginning of July 1813, then, he was seeing Augusta in London. Note has been made of Byron's letter written to her at the end of March; he was at Eywood during nearly the whole of April; so far as we can tell he was in London continuously through May, attending to the publication of *The Giaour*, negotiating the interview with Caroline, and keeping sundry social engagements; in June, as we have seen, he was in attendance on Lady Oxford with no more than momentary intervals until she sailed. So that we may conclude that, when Augusta arrived in London at the end of the month, she met her brother on terms of affection that had found nothing but casual expression since the friendly days before he left England in 1809. Speaking of the event *Astarte* says, with some extravagance, that there being a crisis of insolvency in her family, "Mrs. Leigh came to Lord Byron in London for an indefinite absence from home." Where Augusta stayed we do not know, though there seems no reason why it should not have been at Lord Carlisle's; the fact that a few months later she was trying to make Byron mollify his ex-guardian after the commotion raised by the Prince Regent lines suggests that her relations with Carlisle were still amicable. In any case, she did not actually stay with Byron, as might seem to be suggested, since he writes to her in London, saying that he will call for her on the way to an appointment that they have together. That her absence from home was not indefinite will be seen.

With her departure for Sicily Lady Oxford's association with Byron came to an end. Within a few days Caroline Lamb brought her own to a final crisis. At a party given by Lady Heathcote, on July 6th, was enacted a scene that became a minor classic in the scandal of the time. Its origins are uncertain. Lady Airlie, in an account of the gathering that fixes in a few sentences

a brilliant picture of Regency fashion, describes Byron as passing through the fascinated crowd, with Lady Oxford on his arm, being confronted by Caroline, refusing to recognise her, and passing on to the supper-room, while Lady Oxford uttered "an affected laugh." The dramatic propriety of this would be perfect, but Lady Oxford had left England a week before. In writing to Byron of the subsequent events of the evening, Lady Melbourne twice mentions Lady O. as having been concerned in this incident, and Lady Airlie reasonably enough took this to be Lady Oxford.[1] The reference, however, was to Lady Ossulstone, who visited Byron in the middle of the night to inform him of what had happened. Caroline had, for some reason, become hysterically incensed. Lady Oxford can have had nothing to do with it, and it is likely that the story of a conversation in which Caroline asked Byron, quite unnecessarily, whether she might waltz, and he replied to the effect that she could do what she liked for all he cared, is substantially true. She left him, and, professing to be outraged at his treatment, she was for some time in another room while friends vainly tried to coax her out of her convulsions. Refusing to be consoled, she at length made what was generally reported to be a gesture of stabbing herself, some said with a sharp instrument, some with a piece of broken glass. She drew blood, but every one seems to have been agreed that the wound was a very discreet one. She herself afterwards told Medwin that it was an accident. Lady Melbourne, who was present, saying that Caroline scratched herself merely, saw nothing remotely tragic in the absurdity of the occasion. But some element of tragedy we may concede. If Caroline Lamb, in the later phases of her intrigue with Byron, behaved a good deal like a lunatic, she at least was the most tormented victim of the lunacy.

The intrigue itself guttered to a climax at Lady Heathcote's and thereafter it was, in Byron's life, a spent force. For a week or two there were apologies and protests, and then the whole affair with Caroline dwindled into the recesses of Byron's memory.

1 When her book, *In Whig Society,* was written, Byron's letter announcing Lady Oxford's departure from England had not been published.

Six weeks later he writes: "Of C. I know nothing. I hear very seldom from her, and then she sends me sermons and fruit—that if one don't make me sick, the other may." In November he asks Murray to send her one of the earliest copies of *The Bride of Abydos*, with the author's compliments. For a brief period in the middle of 1814 Caroline renewed the attack, more than once waylaying Byron at his rooms or walking in on him unannounced. His natural exasperation culminated in an explosive letter to Lady Melbourne, and again the storm faded away. Once during Byron's married life in London Caroline called at Piccadilly, but Annabella was cold and the poet embarrassed. At the time of the separation she seems to have been genuinely anxious for Byron's good name, though some accounts charge her with having herself spread the most damaging of the rumours. That she did this is improbable, but she was to leave almost delirious testimony of a passion that she looked upon as the disaster of her life. In 1816 she published *Glenarvon*, a three-volume romance of which Byron was the satanic hero, and herself the dishevelled heroine. Lady Bessborough, William Lamb, Lady Holland, Lady Oxford, Lady Byron, and others of the circle were introduced into the story with no pretence of disguise. The novel, as a work of art, merely excites wonder that so much energy could have been sustained by so barren a disorder of mind. Its invention is hardly more than half-witted, and its violence has no impact. The book, nevertheless, has a real autobiographical interest. Caroline Lamb saw Byron and his world through precisely the sort of temperament that created the Byronic legend. By experience and in imagination she came very intimately into contact with a character of which she realised only certain lurid aspects. These aspects she courted and indulged, and when they had destroyed her peace she perceived in them the sum of a nature of which they were in reality but deceptive and very broken lights. The result is to be found in *Glenarvon*. From the incoherence of the story, if we persevere sufficiently with its thousand pages, we may catch a faint but perfect distillation of the Byron who was mad, bad, and, very seductively, dangerous to know. Save for a moment in the last scene of all Caroline Lamb

will appear no more in our story; in parting she may give a few words from the description of Glenarvon as he first appeared to Calantha, the heroine:

It seemed as if the soul of passion had been stamped and printed on every feature. The eye beamed into life as it threw up its dark ardent gaze, with a look nearly of inspiration, while the proud curl of the upper lip expressed haughtiness and bitter contempt; yet, even mixed with these fierce characteristic feelings, an air of melancholy and dejection shaded and softened every harsher expression. . . . Calantha felt the power, not then alone, but evermore. . . . She could have knelt and prayed heaven to realise the dreams, to bless the fallen angel in whose presence she at that moment stood.

We must here continue to note dates with some care. Augusta's child, Elizabeth Medora, was born on April 15th, 1814.[1] The more uncompromising of Byron's challengers would, therefore, find it very convenient if it could be shown that Augusta was continuously away from home and with Byron during July, August, and the early part of September 1813. In the absence of proof, suggestions even of "indefinite absence" may have their uses. The facts, so far as they can be ascertained, are these. Augusta came to London about June 26th. On July 8th Byron told Moore that she was in town, which was "a great comfort,—for, never having been much together, we are naturally more attached to each other." On the 13th he was thinking of "becoming seriously enamoured" with Lady Adelaide Forbes, of whom we hear nothing further of consequence beyond that he told Lady Blessington some years later that he had thought of marrying her. On some date, which cannot be fixed, not later than July 29th, Augusta returned to Six Mile Bottom, since on the 30th Byron told Lady Melbourne that he had heard from her, on the 31st he told Murray that he was leaving London on the morrow, and on August 5th he announced to Lady Melbourne that his sister had returned with him from Newmarket. He adds that she is going abroad with him. On the 12th he supplements

[1] *Astarte* is the authority. *Medora Leigh* (1869) gives the date as 1815, but this amounts to nothing as evidence.

this information to another correspondent by saying that her husband is obliged to retrench. On the 21st Augusta has again returned to the country, and Byron tells Lady Melbourne that, although he and Augusta both wish to go to Sicily, he will probably go alone after all, as there are bad reports of the plague; moreover, his sister proposes to take one of her children with them, and Lady Oxford had already sickened him of everybody's children. Ten days later he writes to Lady Melbourne, "Your kind letter is *unanswerable*." This is assumed to refer to a grave warning from her as to the consequence of his leaving England with Augusta. The unanswerable letter has been lost, but we learn that this was its nature from a memorandum that we are told was made by Lady Byron in 1817. It will be seen that the evidence produced by the Astartians is here as unimpressive as it has a way of being at crucial moments. It need only be observed that in view of Byron's intentions as stated in his letter of August 21st there is no apparent reason why Lady Melbourne should so strongly dissuade him from a course which he did not propose to take. However that may be, no more was heard of the joint Sicilian tour, and at this point a new element comes into the story and an old one rediscovers itself.

11

Byron at some time not later than 1810 had formed an acquaintance with James Wedderburn Webster, who in that year married Lady Frances Caroline Annesley, daughter of the Earl of Mountnorris (Viscount Valentia). Late in 1811 Byron wrote three or four letters to Webster that suggest some degree of intimacy. They exchanged carriages, Byron was to be godfather to his friend's first child, and he was hoping at some time to accept an invitation to stay with the Websters in Dorset. He may have met Lady Frances in London, but there is nothing beyond formal references to her in the letters to show this; and it seems clear, from his correspondence with Lady Melbourne, that he took no interest in her until September 1813. So that when he writes to Moore on August 22nd, 1813, "I am at this moment in a far

more serious—and entirely new—scrape than any of the last twelve months," it is difficult to accept Lord Ernle's conclusion—arrived at before the publication of the Melbourne correspondence—that the reference is to Lady Frances. It may have been to Augusta, but if the "scrape" with her was already a disastrously accomplished fact, the events of the ensuing weeks become almost incredibly fantastic. We will follow them.

Augusta was now away from London, presumably back at Six Mile Bottom. On September 8th and 9th Byron, in successive letters, speaks to Lady Melbourne of some undefined possibility that may make it improper for her further to acknowledge him as a correspondent. He continued to write to her constantly for another eighteen months. We may also note that, astonishing as it may seem, he was at this moment again writing to Miss Milbanke, and with Lady Melbourne's knowledge. That he had, since his rejection, remained sensitive to Annabella's opinion we gather from his anxiety in July to correct a report that had reached her of ungenerous conduct on his part towards the purchaser of Newstead. Now, on August 25th, begins a correspondence that was carried on between them intermittently until March 1814. In his journal for November 30th Byron remarks on the peculiarity of their relationship, "without one spark of love on either side"; but the letters have a much more susceptible tone than this would suggest. Annabella told Lady Melbourne that she had been reading his poetry with fresh pleasure, and explained that, as doubtless the lapse of time since his proposal would make such an adventure safe, she was prompted to write to him and to renew his acquaintance. She would even "incur the risk of being called a Flirt." On August 25th Byron acknowledges a letter from her at some length. He says: "L^{y} M. was perfectly correct in her statement that I preferred you to all others; it was then the fact; it is so still." He adds: "I must be candid with you on the score of friendship. It is a feeling towards you with which I cannot trust myself. I doubt whether I could help loving you." But she need fear no persecution from him. On September 6th he writes again, this time on more general topics, but again in reply to a letter from her.

On September 8th and 9th he wrote to Lady Melbourne in the manner above mentioned.

On September 15th, 1813, Byron wrote to Webster, saying that he could no longer resist his invitation, and that he hoped to set out for Aston Hall, Rotheram, where the Websters were now living, immediately. On the same day he wrote to Augusta, telling her that his movements were uncertain, but that he would let her know what he decided to do. When his passage abroad is finally secured, she must tell him whether or not she will be able to visit him before he leaves. On the 21st he informs Lady Melbourne of his arrival at Aston Hall, and gives a graphic account of the household. "Lady Frances is a pretty, pleasing woman, but in delicate health, and, I fear, going—if not gone—into a decline." Webster is fond and jealous, but, Byron thinks, a little restive. Webster, in fact, had much wider views of his own privileges than of his wife's. A year younger than Byron, he had already, when staying at Newstead with the poet, been observed paying attention to a certain "nymph of the Abbey," and he had expressed a wish to go to Newstead again; also there were more serious complications. But Byron sees no promise of advantage to himself in Lady Frances. Twenty years of age, she seemed a "very good, well-disposed wife," and apt to remain so unless Webster teased her into disliking him.

Byron left Aston on September 24, 1813, in order to escape the Doncaster races, but with an invitation to return when they were over. On the 26th he writes to Annabella from London, where he has been happy to find another letter from her awaiting him. He addresses her as "My dear Friend," assured that she will permit him to do so. She has clearly been admonishing, or catechising him. He admits his restless doctrines, his discontent, his pride, he confesses to religious scepticism, he has already sent her a short note from Aston, and he now hopes that she will answer his present long letter at equal length. How seriously all he was saying to Annabella must be taken may be questioned, but that he was at great pains to impress her is evident. And, on the whole, we must admit that his letters can hardly have failed in their intention.

On the 28th Byron has heard that Webster is cultivating an intrigue with a countess who is staying with her husband at Aston, and he tells Lady Melbourne that trouble will come of it, and that the example will do Lady Frances no good. In this letter he says: "I have tried, and hardly, too, to vanquish my demon; but to very little purpose, for a resource that seldom failed me before did in this instance. I mean *transferring* my regards to another, of which I had a fair and not *discouraging* opportunity at one time." It is suggested that this means a transference of affection from Augusta to Lady Frances. But it is perfectly clear that at this date he had had no sort of encouragement from Lady Frances, and that there was not the slightest justification for his speaking at present of a fair opportunity in this connection. We can only fall back on guess-work for an explanation of this as of other passages in the story; but the Augusta-Lady Frances theory does not bear examination. On September the 30th Byron writes to Webster saying that he intends to leave town on the following Sunday for Aston, and he has not yet had an answer from his sister to Lady Frances Webster's very kind invitation; "pray assure Lady Frances that I never can forget the obligation conferred upon me in this respect." Augusta did not go, but that she should have been asked is significant. There was no possible reason for the Websters to involve themselves gratuitously in a scandal, and Byron can hardly have been happy, as he plainly was, at the prospect of taking Augusta with him, if they were to stay in a house where he had designs that must have outraged her emotions in the circumstances that we are asked to believe had then arisen. And, even if we dismiss those designs, as I think up to this moment we must, these same circumstances would still make such a visit to an unfamiliar household strangely embarrassing. Taking this incident at its face value, the only rational reading of it is that the Websters thought it an obvious courtesy to ask Byron to bring his sister to stay with them, and that Byron was aware of no reason for declining so natural a proposal. Byron concludes his letter with some advice to Webster about his countess.

On October 5th Byron was back at Aston, and affairs there

took an immediate turn. Webster was in a difficult mood; the countess had cozened him, and he had, as Byron reports to Lady Melbourne, lost his "time and temper." There is a suspicion that he had also lost his money; Byron had already hinted that the lady was mercenary. Webster's way of recovering from the reverse was to give rein to his natural jealousy; he began to watch Byron and put leading questions to him, with the inevitable result that he provoked the situation that he wished to avoid. But did he wish it? There is just an element of doubt here. His behaviour unquestionably made Byron consider Lady Frances with a livelier interest than before, and indifference rapidly gave way to an unaffected fervour. The progress of this new attachment was reported with unsparing frankness by Byron to Lady Melbourne, and for a time he was absorbed by it. Once the attack was delivered, Lady Frances was not long in realising that here was an impetuousness not to be trifled with; but the beginning of the affair is attended by an odd circumstance. Unfortunately Frances Webster is herself a very vaguely defined figure, and we cannot be sure what was her exact part at first. Her marriage, when she was seventeen, had been one of convenience, and that she would be proof against Byron's charms if he chose to exert them is unlikely. Personally she was for Byron, on October 5th, no more than mildly attractive; he had not seen "much in her to encourage hope, or much fulfilment of hope, supposing I had any." She is pretty, "interesting enough in her manner and figure," but not sufficiently animated or striking to stir him to anything but a very temperate admiration. But three days later there is a decided change in tone. Lady Frances has casually asked him how a woman can inform a man that she likes him when he does not perceive it. Byron would hardly let indifference survive such an opening. His declaration was made—in the billiard-room, he is careful to inform Lady Melbourne—and favourably received. More secluded meetings being a matter of some difficulty, notes of a tender nature were written and exchanged under Webster's eye. Lady Frances's first contribution to this correspondence was "a very unequivocal one, but a little too much about virtue, and indulgence of attachment in some sort

of ethereal process, in which the soul is principally concerned, which I don't very well understand, being a bad metaphysician. . . . I hope, nevertheless, that this spiritual system won't last long." He ends his letter by saying that he has heard from Annabella, who is a "little demure nonjuror," and that he is now going to billiards. At six o'clock a postscript is added to say that the "business is growing serious" and that "Platonism is in some peril." At ten o'clock yet another states that Webster, under the influence of claret, has just bet him that he—Webster—will win any given woman against any given man. Which, in the circumstances, strikes Byron as touching a note of high comedy.

It is possible that the comic mastery was finer than he knew. Certainly the action that now discovered itself would have taxed the most daring invention of Restoration genius. On the next day, October 9th, Byron went down to Newstead. Webster—alone—accompanied him. Over a varied selection from Byron's cellar Webster boasted that he was fortunate in possessing a wife without passion. On the 10th Byron wrote to Hanson, instructing him to arrange a loan of a thousand pounds which he wishes to advance to James Webster Wedderburn Webster, Esquire. And on the same day he wrote to Augusta explaining that his silence is not due to displeasure, but to circumstances of which he cannot at the moment tell her; he hopes she is better, and will continue *best* and is "ever, my dearest, Yours, B." On the 11th Byron and Webster were back at Aston, where Byron could tell Lady Melbourne that all was promising well, but that developments were retarded by the topography of the house. In a day or two, however, the whole party were to move to Newstead for a week, and then he looks for advancement.

Day by day, almost hour by hour, Lady Melbourne is told by Byron of Webster's suspicions and stupidity, of Lady Frances's growing kindness and graces, and of his own deepening passion. By the 13th the new mistress of his attentions has become "very handsome, and very gentle, though sometimes decisive; fearfully romantic, and singularly warm in her *affections;* but I should think of a *cold* temperament, yet I have my doubts on that point too." On the 14th he is convinced that nothing but the oppor-

tunity is wanting. The journey to Newstead was taken, and on the 17th Lady Melbourne was informed of an extremely surprising turn of events. The opportunity had occurred, and Byron had not taken it. "I am entirely at your *mercy*. I own it. I give myself up to you. I am not *cold*—whatever I seem to others; but I know that I cannot bear the reflection hereafter. Do not imagine that these are mere words. I tell you the truth—now act as you will." Thus Lady Frances, as reported by Byron to Lady Melbourne. The situation was not provided for in the ordinary codes of gallantry, and he had to act on improvised principles. Happily his instinct survived the test; and it is clear that the affair never went beyond this point. He afterwards wondered whether Lady Frances had not all the time been fooling him—the thousand pounds may in some way have associated itself with her in his mind, as it faintly does in ours. But in the meantime, the incident sharpened Byron's zest; for a time he was even seriously inclined to take decisive steps. Lady Melbourne asked him whether he was prepared to go all lengths. "If you mean . . . anything including duel, or divorce? I answer, *Yes*. I love her." For several weeks he was of the same mind, even discussing a project for taking Lady Frances south to build up her constitution when she was his wife. But she considerately declined his proposal for his sake, willing as she declared herself to be on her own account. On November 8th Byron writes to Augusta that while he is in *no immediate* peril he is very much involved with some one who is neither Caroline Lamb nor Lady Oxford.[1] Who it is she may be able to guess. And on November

[1] Mr. Richard Edgcumbe devotes a considerable part of his book *Byron: The Last Phase* (Murray 1909) to a theory that this referred to a renewal of Byron's relations with Mary Chaworth Musters, who was now separated from her husband. Mr. Edgcumbe elaborates his case to the extent of making Mrs. Musters the mother of Medora Leigh by Byron, and the real cause of the separation in 1816. Augusta is supposed to have refrained from clearing her own name, in order to shield the married woman who Mr. Edgcumbe thinks was the only lasting passion of Byron's life. Mr. Edgcumbe makes many very good points, but, for reasons that need not be detailed here—they should be plain already from the present work by implication at least—his theory does not seem to me to be tenable even on the evidence he had before him, while since the publication of the Melbourne correspondence it is clearly even less so. But one important service Mr. Edgcumbe did: he greatly strengthened the feeling that the case as presented by *Astarte* was an extremely loose one.

10th he wrote a long letter to Miss Milbanke, saying that he agrees with her upon mathematics, but "must be content to admire them at an incomprehensible distance." Moreover, there is no one to whom he would listen more readily upon some other subject—which seems to be the immortality of the soul.

Lady Frances Webster drifts out of the story as she drifted in. On November 17th Byron notes in his journal that Webster seems to be apprehensive of being asked to refund the loan, which vexes Byron a good deal more than having been asked to make it. Prepared for any emergency, it was gradually impressed upon him that emergency of any kind was the last thing in Lady Frances's intention. She would, to be sure, do anything he wanted; but he must please not want her to do anything. Her ingenuousness bewilders him; which may have been its design. Whether or not there was some mild form of collusion between Webster and his wife, there is no doubt that she became very much engaged in her affections with Byron; but there is also no doubt that for reasons known to herself she marshalled her emotions much more adroitly than he did. In this girl of twenty Byron for once found a mistress who was perhaps as ready as another to lose her heart, but who firmly declined to lose her head. It was, no doubt, rather disturbing. Before long Byron grew tired of it, possibly to the lady's relief. She afterwards left her husband, and in 1816 was successfully party to an action in which large damages were awarded for a libel published against herself and the Duke of Wellington.

On November 29th Byron wrote at length again to Annabella, acknowledging a further letter from her, and with what might seem rather needless gravity complimenting himself and her upon their security against the more precarious feelings. In order, we may suppose, to make this clearer, after a short interval he wrote her at least three more letters within a month.

In the meantime, early in January, Byron told both Augusta and Lady Melbourne that Mary Chaworth, now Mrs. Musters, was writing to him and asking for an interview. Mr. Edgcumbe, as we have seen, attaches what seems to be a fictitious importance to this circumstance, but it did no doubt occupy Byron's

attention somewhat closely for a few weeks at least. Mr. Edgcumbe can quote Moore, whose word as we have pointed out must in such matters be respected, in support of his belief that Byron throughout his life remembered his love for Mary Chaworth with deep emotion, and her appeal now for counsel and friendship when she was in domestic difficulties no doubt moved him considerably. His letters show that her position was a source of real anxiety to him, and he seems not to have spared himself any trouble in being of what use he could. But when he says to Lady Melbourne, "You see, there is no love in the case and that I do not write '*con* amore,' as I did from Aston," we can but remember that to this correspondent, above all others, he was even shamelessly unsecretive, and leave the matter at that.

In the middle of January he went down to Newstead, and Augusta accompanied him, on what appears to have been her first visit to the place. After she had left London in the middle of August it is possible that he had seen her at Six Mile Bottom between September 11th and 15th, but we only know that he said he was going off somewhere at that time (we do not know that he went) adding that he would not discuss his plans with Lady Melbourne, as she would dissuade him. Apart from those days there is no evidence that he had seen Augusta between August and the present date of their journey to Newstead. On the day of his departure from London he noted in his diary that a wife would be his salvation, and he is attracted by Lady Frances's younger sister Catherine, who is beautiful but, he fears, a fool. Lady Catherine means nothing to us, but the implication does. If we accept the proposition of *Astarte*, we have to allow Augusta to have been a woman of unparalleled forbearance. Byron and his sister remained some three weeks at Newstead, being kept there a fortnight longer than was intended by phenomenal snows. We know nothing of the visit but that Mr. Claughton, the provisional purchaser of Newstead, was with them for a day or two, that the brother and sister kept each other amused by never yawning or disagreeing, and that Hanson was told that Mrs. Leigh's condition made it doubly necessary to delay their return until the roads were safe. By the middle of February Byron was back

in London, on the 19th he was writing to Miss Milbanke and again on March 3rd and 15th, on which last day he writes in his journal: "A letter from Bella, which I answered. I shall be in love with her again if I don't take care." The first week in April he spent at Six Mile Bottom with Augusta, Colonel Leigh being in Yorkshire. On the 9th he told Moore that he meant to marry if anybody would have him, and that he was "very tolerably in love"; on the 15th Medora Leigh was born; on the 18th he could throw out a hint to Lady Melbourne that Annabella's feelings towards him had changed, and that a second advance might be less unfavourably received; on the 25th he wrote the classic letter, already quoted, about "it" not being an Ape; in June he was momentarily inspired by a first meeting with his cousin, Mrs. Wilmot,[1] for whom he wrote *She Walks in Beauty, like the Night;* in the middle of the same month we have the first sign of continued communication with Augusta, on an irrelevant topic; a few days later another letter to his sister deals solicitously —and almost exclusively—with her financial affairs; on September 13th and 15th he told Hobhouse and Moore respectively that he was awaiting a decision upon a matter of paramount importance. He had, in fact, again proposed to Miss Milbanke. On the 18th he informed Lady Melbourne and Hanson that he had been accepted.

12

The other, and manifold, aspects of Byron's life during this period of Boccaccian intrigues that came to so unforeseen a conclusion have already been given in at least representative outline. The consequences of this new situation have, further, been discussed at length in an earlier chapter. Something must be told of the incidents of Byron's engagement and marriage, but first I may ask to be indulged while I make a personal confession.

[1] It is of interest to note that this lady was a cousin also of Sir Sitwell Sitwell, the great-great-grandfather of the present family of poets. Mr. Osbert Sitwell tells me that the Sitwell ladies were so much under the spell of Byron that, in deference to his prejudices, "they never ate anything in public"; but Mr. Sitwell adds that they "had substantial meals served privately to them afterwards in their bedrooms."

For several months in the writing of this book I have lived in as close a contact with Byron and his movements as I could devise. I have read and reread and deliberated upon many thousands of pages left in records of his life by contemporaries and witnesses who spoke in the living tradition of his story. And I have become more convinced at each succeeding stage of my study that, with the evidence as we have it, no final solution of the obscurities pervading the years 1813 and 1814 is possible. The progress of events as I have tried to present it in the immediately preceding pages cannot, I think, be challenged on any essential point; to reconcile it as a whole with any normal experience of motives and conduct is, I am convinced, beyond human wit. I do not think that this greatly matters. That we lack, as I am more and more inclined to believe we do, some forgotten or concealed key-word, as it were, to the problem does not make the material less absorbing in its present definition. The story of these years is, and must remain, of arresting human significance, even though we cannot resolve it into perfect equation. But I am sure that the easy citation of a few acutely suggestive passages from the Melbourne correspondence is not a sufficient answer to the riddles that tease the action which I have here attempted to summarise.

Lady Melbourne was delighted with Byron's news. Completely in his confidence, knowing more than most people about his character, and fully informed as to Annabella's matrimonial views, she welcomed the betrothal with unhesitating satisfaction. How she managed to do this is buried in the enigmas of a hundred years ago; but she did. Augusta, too, was all approval. Byron himself was at once intent on convulsive reform. Annabella, conscious of her responsibilities, prayed. Her parents, confident of the prayers, approved of the match. Byron, vaguely conscious of having stepped out of an oriental reality into a respectable English dream, found a dozen excuses for delay in responding to their cordial invitation to visit them. When at last further postponement was impossible, he found that he negatively liked Sir Ralph and actively disliked Lady Milbanke. Annabella on these new terms he understood less than ever. He had told Moore early in October that she was perfection,

though he had not seen her for ten months. But it was not until the beginning of November that he arrived at Seaham to reassure himself of this impression. He found the perfection veiled in a disconcerting silence; but the lawyers had drawn their settlements, and there was no going back. If she was sufficiently resolved, he persuaded himself, she could bring them both through to success in what he plainly knew to be a desperate venture. The marriage was fixed for January 2nd, 1815.

On October 19th Hobhouse was asked to be best man. On December 24th he joined Byron in London, and at midday they set out for the north together. At Chesterford they separated, Byron going to Six Mile Bottom and Hobhouse to Cambridge, where Byron rejoined him on the 26th. They moved on, but, says Hobhouse, "never was lover in less haste." In the late evening of December 30th they arrived at Seaham, in the county of Durham, and Hobhouse recorded his first impression of Annabella: "rather dowdy-looking, and wears a long and high dress, though she has excellent feet and ankles. . . . The lower part of her face is bad, the upper, expressive, but not handsome, yet she gains by inspection." On seeing Byron she threw her arms round his neck and burst into tears, while Hobhouse was unsuccessfully trying to offer Lady Milbanke excuses for their belated arrival. Sir Ralph, a little prosy, but agreeable, told stories to his visitors, among whom were his agent and the Rev. Thomas Noel, an illegitimate son of Lord Wentworth and rector of Kirkby Mallory, there to perform the ceremony. On the 31st Annabella had advanced in Hobhouse's judgment into being "most attractive," but Byron had been put in mind by something of Caroline Lamb's version of the seventh commandment—Thou shalt not bother. High spirits were generally encouraged, though we detect some semblance of strain. The New Year was seen in with a mock marriage performed by the men. Every one on New Year's Day was a little subdued. On the 2nd Hobhouse, in full dress and white gloves, came down to find Byron and Noel ready for the ceremony, which was to take place in the house. Lady Milbanke appeared, to give them tea, but her hand was not steady enough. At twenty minutes to eleven they were joined in the

drawing-room by Annabella, dressed in a severely plain white muslin gown and attended by her governess, Mrs. Clermont. At eleven o'clock the service began, Annabella "firm as a rock," Byron unsure of his responses and plainly suffering from stage-fright. At twelve o'clock the couple drove away, Annabella in "a slate-coloured satin pelisse trimmed with white fur," to the salute of the Seaham church bells and half a dozen muskets. It was then that Annabella said, "If I am not happy it will be my own fault." Hobhouse noted in his journal that he felt as though he had buried a friend.

The honeymoon, or the treacle-moon as Byron called it, was spent between Seaham and Halnaby, the latter a Yorkshire house belonging to the Milbankes. The Byrons then returned to London, where they rented a house from the Duchess of Devonshire at 13 Piccadilly Terrace. After the separation it was discovered that Byron had treated his wife badly during the later months of their married life in London, and there seems to be no doubt that his behaviour at a critical period was lamentably inconsiderate. And yet in this, as so often, Byron has contrived to make the worst of himself, or has provoked others to do it for him. Failure in obvious obligations at such a time cannot be excused, nor can any one wish to excuse them. But we have to remember that his offence here was due not to wanton and unintelligible cruelty, but to a disillusionment that was inevitable. This came even sooner than might have been expected, and Byron characteristically made little pretence of resisting it. His natural cynicism in such matters was never tempered by anything that could be called stoutness of will; we may deplore it, but it is the fact. But resolution, while it might have put off disaster for a time, could never have made a lasting success of a marriage that was suitable in no single respect. It had not even the negative advantages of a marriage made for convenience by indifferent parties. It was in its way a love match, but enough has been said to show that it was between two high-spirited and emphatic personalities that could not have been more desperately ill-sorted. So that Byron's conduct, though it displayed itself to the worst possible advantage, was but the dismally foregone issue

of given character and environment. Also it must be allowed that, while later testimony is clear as to his delinquencies, we should hardly suspect them from the records of the time itself.

For a few months all was, so far as we know, well. At first Byron tells Moore that Lady Byron is as likely to promote domestic affections as Bessy herself. At the end of a month he tells the same friend that, if marriage were on lease, he should certainly renew his on expiry, even though it had to be for ninety-nine years. In the middle of February Augusta writes to Hodgson that she is confident that all will turn out very happily. A month later the Byrons have been staying at Six Mile Bottom, and Augusta again tells Hodgson that Annabella is as near perfection as possible and Byron properly sensible of her value. This letter, however, sounds a note of warning. Byron is, it seems, considerably distressed in his money matters. Annabella prudently does not refer to these things, but we remember the duns and executions that added to the bitterness of their last days together. But this forbearance is but a fresh proof of Annabella's merits. "In short, the more I see of her the more I love and esteem her, and feel how grateful I ought to be for the blessing of such a wife for my dear, darling B." At intervals in his correspondence Byron mentions his wife, always with affection and solicitude. In September he is at Six Mile Bottom again, this time by himself: "Bell is in town, and well." At the end of October his anxiety about the approaching confinement finds perfectly natural expression in a letter to Moore. On January 5th, 1816, he announces that his daughter, Augusta Ada, was born on December 10th, and that her mother is doing well and is up again.

In the meantime Byron had during these months been taking an active part in the management of Drury Lane Theatre. His accounts of this enterprise are full of his happiest humour. "Essex[1] has endeavoured to persuade Keen not to get drunk; the consequence of which is, that he has never been sober since." He remonstrates with Dibdin, the manager, on the freedom of dialogue in a new piece, that contains the word "ravish" half

[1] Lord Essex was with Byron on the Sub-committee.

a dozen times in one scene, and in a sense that cannot be read as "raptures." He appeared on one occasion among a crowd on the stage, wearing a mask, to see what a theatre looked like from that vantage, and found it "very grand." He was called upon to arbitrate in "a devil of a row among our ballerinas," he had a thorough investigation made of the five hundred manuscript plays lying in the dust of the shelves at the theatre, to find them all inconceivably bad, he interviewed applicants for parts and infuriated dramatists, and he found it all "very good fun." But he took his responsibility seriously too, and cared very much about the success of his theatre. He tried to get plays from the best writers of the time, succeeding with Coleridge and failing with Moore and Scott. His behaviour to Coleridge at this time is a touching example of the generosity with which he could use his influence. He caused *Remorse* to be produced at Drury Lane, he withdrew the opinion expressed of Coleridge in *English Bards* as "pert, and petulant, and shallow," he gave him a hundred pounds, he asked Moore to review him not merely well but handsomely in *The Edinburgh Review*, and he introduced him to Murray's very liberal attention. Leigh Hunt was also a subject of his interest with Murray, and that Byron's favours were not only bestowed on established writers is seen from a letter of July written to a stranger, an unknown and now nameless poet, complimenting him on a volume that has come Byron's way by chance and offering to help in any way that may be in his power. It must have been an intoxicating thing for a beginner to receive from the most celebrated poet of the time an unsolicited letter hoping that no offence would be taken by this intrusion, asking the honour of his company at breakfast, and assuring him that to be allowed to assist so admirable a gift was the earnest wish of his faithful friend and warm admirer, Byron. It may be added that Coleridge, roused by Byron's courtesies, promised to write a new tragedy for the theatre, but forgot to do it. Moore resisted the temptation, and Scott, whom Byron first met and frequently saw at Murray's during 1815, excused himself on the ground that he was afraid of the green-room.

The real nature of domestic life in the Byron household re-

mains necessarily a matter of conjecture only. On November 25th Hobhouse noted in his diary: "Called on Byron. In that quarter things do not go well." With a good deal of money somewhere in the background, Byron was as usual pressed for current income, and by the standards of their own society they seem to have lived modestly enough, calculating closely to the matter of a carriage and entertaining very unambitiously. After a time Byron is said to have become restive at meals, coming to and leaving the table without times or ceremony. One of his affectations was that he disliked seeing women eat; he had complained about his Italian opera singer at Cheltenham that her only fault was that she swallowed chicken-wings, sweetbreads, custards, peaches, and port wine at supper. Annabella, more temperately, may have affected him in the same way. And his wife may have begun to discover in him occasional coarseness of a less imaginary kind. The streak of vulgarity in Byron's character was not dominant, but it was there, and it was of the kind that nothing excites more easily than the strain of domestic relations. Annabella, we may believe, got on Byron's nerves. It is almost certain that any wife would have done this; but she was likely to do it with peculiar expedition. His retaliation was equally likely to display that part of his nature least touched by refinement. If she provoked him, he, no doubt, shocked her in return. Taste never served Byron too securely, and in these months it may often have been gravely at fault. We get stray reflections of his grosser mood in his correspondence at the time, as more than once in such apostrophes as "sun-burn me!" that so outraged Matthew Arnold. On one occasion he writes that, on the day of a national dinner to be given by Moore in Ireland, he will get drunk himself "and waft you an applauding hiccup over the Channel." This is wit degenerating for the moment into real obscenity, and such moments may well have seemed intolerable to Annabella. She was a prude at heart, and she became a bigot; but she was a girl with a naturally bred aversion to mere bad manners. That she had often to suffer them is, as we have said, evident only on words spoken with the events in distorted retrospect; we have at the time no more than

fragmentary hints of such dissension. When we are gravely assured that Byron, when his wife was brought to bed, indulged such petty persecution as discharging the corks of his soda-water bottles against the ceiling under her room, we are prepared for any absurdity.

Of direct light upon Annabella herself during the year that she was with Byron we get little. A few formal compliments in diaries of the time do not help us much, and her own recollections organised after the separation help us less. She found Byron tiresome as a housemate we may be sure, and she must have been constantly perplexed in the effort to reconcile an intellectual desire to live up to his scandalising genius with her own demure instincts. Also, she may have been jealous, and it may have been with reason. That Augusta was at this time under no suspicion we know, but there are faint indications elsewhere of at least a questioning mind. It was, indeed, to Augusta herself that she wrote in August, speaking in high terms of Byron, but saying that she had met Mrs. Musters, and that such a "wicked-looking cat" she never saw. The expression is just a shade short of disingenuousness. And Byron at Drury Lane may have indulged other than strictly managerial enthusiasms. One story circumstantially connects Mrs. Mardyn, then making her London reputation, with his name. This lady is said to have been ineffectually ordered out of the house by his wife. The incident was widely reported at the time as being the real cause of the subsequent separation, but the affair has only the authority of gossip. Another rumour gave Mrs. Mardyn a son by Byron, who, with positive evidence in his hand by which to exonerate himself refused to use it, saying in a passage of obvious integrity, "I would not stir a step out of my way to prevent them from indulging their favourite theme; slander will find its own level." This was the spirit in Byron that has been able to survive all the onsets of cynicism. A theory of a much later date attributes the cause of Lady Byron's break with her husband to his intrigue with Clare Clairmont. The suggestion seems to be equally unfounded, but further reference will be made to it.

The principal events of the separation itself, and the con-

troversial problems that it raised, have been fully considered in an earlier chapter of this book, and call for no further discussion here. It is enough to say that on January 4th Annabella told Lady Melbourne that her confinement had been greatly helped by Augusta's kindness, and that Byron had two new poems appearing, *The Siege of Corinth* and *Parisina*. On the 5th Byron wrote to Moore, as we have seen, telling him that his wife and daughter were doing well. On the 12th Annabella was writing to Hanson about Byron's symptoms of mental disorder, and on the 15th she left London and never saw her husband again. The rest has been told. It was not until February 5th that Lady Melbourne informed Byron of a report in town that he and Annabella had parted; she attached no importance to it, but it was so persistent that she had to acquaint him of it. On the 15th she has had it confirmed, and offers her assistance in any way that it may be acceptable. Friendly efforts in several quarters towards a reconciliation failed. During the weeks through which the miserable negotiations on the terms of separation dragged on Byron conducted his literary and social correspondence with a brave show of nothing unusual having happened. Wherever the fault lay, it was not with his courage. For courage it very decidedly was to keep a firm hold on himself in these days when his world was crumbling about him into choking dust. To one or two of his intimate friends, notably Moore, he admitted the crisis, but would not discuss it. It has become a spectacle to history, but for Byron—and for others—at the time it was a disaster of quite unheroic bitterness. To write the poems of the separation, the fierce but poignant reproach of his wife and the lampoon of her woman whom he believed to have turned her mind against him, was not to falter in his resolution of public silence. The sincerity of these poems has frequently been impugned, but they are in themselves a sufficient answer to the charge. Their emotion is not feigned, and it serves no purpose to contend that it is. Byron felt these things, and he rhymed himself into some relief from an anguish that was no less severe even though it should be shown that he had brought it on himself. Further, he was justified in showing

these poems privately to his friends. This he declared was his only intention, and he disclaimed all part in their wider publication. Nothing has ever been said responsibly to discredit his good faith in this. Caroline Lamb, on what seems to have been an entirely generous impulse, implored him to suppress them, but the journals had got hold of them and they became the scandal of the day, invested with every kind of base innuendo. It was but an incident in the general sensation that had fallen on society to flatter the fondest hopes of the hired bullies who had rolled up their sleeves on the publication of *Lines on a Lady Weeping*. Their threats had been scarcely veiled; now they were bent on destruction. No probable or improbable fiction was given out but found ready listeners. Moral hypocrisy and political servility joined stridently in the hue and cry. Byron's more furtive enemies were delighted to lament the ruin of a reputation so slightly deserved. Jealous rivals, who had failed in letters because they had neither the wit nor the character to succeed, were happy, like sporting tipsters, to remind their readers how they had always given the odds against the charlatan. The good work was very thoroughly accomplished. Byron's tried friends stood by him, but his name became a topic for every salacious tongue in the town, and his appearance in the streets a signal for public insults. Fashionable hostesses, who a few weeks before had besought him to their parties, now hardly dared acknowledge him even though they knew nine rumours out of ten against him to be wantonly false. Lady Jersey alone, to her undying credit, was woman enough in her great position to declare openly for the fallen favourite. On the eve of his departure from England she gave a farewell gathering at her house in his honour. The prestige of the hostess ensured an imposing attendance, but it could not relieve the event of its constraint. Byron more than ever was an object of curiosity, but to be in his company now was almost an occasion for masks. Everybody was nervous, some coldly, some effusively, and all with astute eyes on their neighbours. Anything like cordiality was beyond the resources of human nature; a few old scores were paid, a few hearts fluttered, and a few matronly warnings were

whispered to inquisitive ears. Byron himself, acutely but not unhumorously conscious of having become a monster in the society that he had so lately adorned, was torn between open resentment and his loyalty to the great lady who had shown him this spirited though discommoding kindness. It was in the monotonies of life that Byron's manners and temper were apt to fail; in a sudden crisis he could be counted on to behave with tact and fitness. He did so at Lady Jersey's party, and, although nothing could convert the evening into a triumph, he did nothing to flatter his traducers. He merely left as early and as quietly as possible. This was in the middle of April 1816. On the 25th he sailed from Dover, a little crowd of curious people watching as Hobhouse and another friend saw him off, and his life in England was at an end.

Chapter IV

A SUMMARY OF CHARACTER

"A man who never displayed a sympathy which was not hostile to the misrulers of mankind."

—Lytton Bulwer, in 1835.

It is necessary here to consider very briefly what manner of man Byron was at this point in his history. In following, as we have done, the detail of his career up to the time of his ascendency and decline in the favour of English society, we should but have prepared for a simplified view of a character that time has proved to be of inexhaustible interest. The enigmas of his domestic life need no longer disturb us; they have taken their place in the action that defines him, and there we may leave them. It must be remembered, then, that the Byron who early in 1816 fell from a position of almost unique privilege and esteem into one of contempt was, in spite of all his faults, one of the most generous spirits of his age, indeed of any age in our literature. He bore his defeat with an assumption of arrogance, and he allowed himself at times to be betrayed into ugly and unworthy rejoinders. But he who was baited into these excesses, without any pretence of a fair trial whatever his offence may or may not have been, was at once a great poet and a man of many rare qualities. His excellence is the more notable by its survival of the clouds of obloquy and superstition that have passed and still pass over his name. Less admirable but more blameless men have been canonised for half his virtues. If Byron was spectacular, it was in his sins, and in this the sensation-mongers of a century have not been slow to play up to his own saturnine game. His intrigues, his fiery little self-assertions, his flashes of vulgarity, his confusions of passion with judgment, his intellectual caprices—these and other such defects of body

and mind have been enjoyed through generations by every species of malice. And there they unquestionably are, for those to enjoy who will. Rightly seen, they compose an essential and even absorbing part of his character; but seen, as they often are, in imperfect adjustment, or in no adjustment at all, to the man as a whole, they are fatally misleading. Obsessed by these, many people fail to realise that Byron was a great man and see in him only a theme for pornographic scandal, which is bad, or moral scandal, which is worse. They know nothing of the daring, the tenderness, the candour and the fortitude that went to the making of a nature which was essentially heroic. Matthew Arnold, indeed, with his usual discernment, insisted that Byron was, even in his offences, distinguished by a passion for this candour in a corrupt but cant-ridden society. But few even of Byron's apologists have seen his shining merits with sufficient certainty; they have rather sought to defend or excuse him for his misdemeanours: they have, in short, addressed themselves to apology instead of confuting Byron's detractors with a complete image of the man. We have spoken of his daring; and we remember his espousal of the workers' cause in the House of Lords, his defence of Leigh Hunt, his challenge to the Regent, his attacks on the bigotries of established religion, his lament upon the discredited Napoleon, and his ridicule of Southey's recantations. We have spoken of his fortitude. At the height of his success, he was attacked with almost unexampled venom and injustice; he was in command of a satirical weapon with which he could have destroyed his critics, and, far from using it, he withdrew from publication the one self-vindication in this kind that he had already made, merely because he felt that he had been inconsiderate. When he was shown a satire upon himself that had been submitted to Murray for publication, he thought it good and urged its acceptance. Attacks upon his own work, after his early passage with *The Edinburgh Review*, he ignored, not because he was indifferent to them but because he was genuinely aware of his own defects as a writer. His letters always turn such censure aside with a jest; but there was more in it than that. Mr. George Street, in an admirable article con-

tributed recently to *The Nineteenth Century*, speaks of Byron's "comic petulance and essential modesty under criticism," and the phrase is a penetrating one. On public grounds, political or social or literary, Byron could be deadly in assault; but in his own defence he was, with the one exception that he regretted, silent. The secret of his candour we have suggested by the use of Arnold's verdict. We have, finally, spoken of his tenderness. To know his letters intimately is to be acquainted with a hundred instances of this. No friend asked for his advice or his money in vain. No young author appealed to his patronage without ample encouragement. No one who was faithful to him, either as an equal or as a servant, was forgotten. Through all the fret and impulsiveness and wit and easy malice of his brilliant correspondence emerges the ineffaceable impression of a man who was in all weathers a good sort. Tom Moore was not the son to tell his mother for nothing of any man that "the overflowing praise he lavishes on me is exactly what might be expected from a profuse, magnificent-minded fellow, who does not wait for scales to weigh what he says, but gives praise, as sailors lend money, by handfuls." And that is what he wrote of Byron. Ladies of prudent liberality like Miss Mitford might see in Byron the "prince of wickedness and poetry," and "a sneering, misanthropic, wretched author," and one "like all vain men, jealous of Napoleon's fame." Nothing could be so fatal a solvent of Byron's imperfections as the venom of so charming a blue-stocking. But Miss Mitford did not know Byron, while Coleridge did. The sage of Highgate, as he had recently become, dilating on "the sumbject" and "the ombject," had reason to speak well of Byron, we know. But he was as little given to flattery as any man who ever lived, and when, in 1816, the scandal of Byron's misadventure reached his ears, he wrote: "If you had seen Lord Byron, you could scarcely disbelieve him—so beautiful a countenance I scarcely ever saw . . . his eyes the open portals of the sun—things of light for light." Coleridge was a visionary, but he was not easily fooled. His testimony scores heavily in Byron's favour, and it is supported by a long array of evidence. The Byron who left England in 1816 was a man

PLATE IX

By Max Beerbohm

who exposed to a vulgar world, not the pageant of his bleeding heart, but his blemishes. They were sufficiently disconcerting, more so to himself than to anybody. But beneath them was a character and a gift that had alike been proved worthy of worthy respect. What became of them thereafter is now to be told.

Chapter V

EXILE

(1816-1823)

"A lamp that spent its oil in blazing."
—JOHNSON, quoted by Egerton Brydges of Byron.

1

NEVER has a life been more suddenly and more completely deflected in its course than was Byron's early in 1816. Had he found himself in prison instead of in social exile the break with his old associations could hardly have been more decisive. The houses he was used to visit, his clubs, his large circle of friends among the best intellect and finest fashion of the day, the House of Lords, which, without taking an active part in its affairs, he would frequently attend, calling on the way perhaps at Berry's to be weighed or at Galt's house to see if he wanted a frank for a letter, the turnpike inns round London to which he would drive out for dinner on summer evenings, the booksellers' shops that were on his daily rounds, the boxing and fencing saloons where he met the fancy on equal terms, the theatres that knew him as a regular patron and the one where he exercised a great and liberal authority, Murray's parlour in Albemarle Street where one might chaff or scold a publisher and run into Walter Scott or Hobhouse or Moore or Coleridge—from all these familiar resorts he disappeared without warning, never to be seen again. He kept up a casual correspondence with a few of his friends, and two or three of them visited him abroad. He had eight more years to live, but, save by formal messages from Augusta, his wife and daughter had passed out of his life for ever. With Augusta herself he kept in touch for

a time, but of her also he had seen the last. His publishing relations with Murray continued, and through them he remained before the English public as possibly the greatest, and certainly the most notorious, poet of his age. But otherwise an occasional letter, a yet more occasional visit from a traveller, and a faithful servant, were all he was ever to have to connect him with the life he had left, beyond the gradually subsiding turmoil of his own recollections. Becoming as he did almost a legendary figure, acquaintances of brief standing like Medwin, Lady Blessington, Trelawny, could make a week or a month of his life into a vivid and crowded book. This circumstance combines with the air of literary bustle that is created by his correspondence with Murray, when we read it more or less at a sitting, to make the Byron of 1816-1824 seem a very intimate and compact figure. The extremely fully documented expedition to Greece completes the impression. But we have to remember that, when all is said, this is only anecdotal evidence of eight years in the life of a teeming energy. Medwin observed at Pisa that Byron's habits had fallen into a simple routine from which he could not bear to be disturbed. And it is important to realise that when due account has been taken of all the anecdotes, significant as many of them are, there remains by far the greater part of those eight years during which there is nothing to relate Byron with his life before 1816, and during which he was, so far as the development of any normal position in human society was concerned, at a deadlock from which there was no escape. Many, many days throughout the rest of his life were spent in an essential loneliness that could be relieved by the resources of his own mind, and in no other way. And he found his escape in poetry. That is the central fact which we have steadily to keep before us in thinking of these last years. Apart from his crowning activity in Greece, the sole and unceasing aim of his life after he left England was poetry. And as a poet he increased in an already astonishing activity, and grew splendidly in achievement.

We say, the sole aim. For it was precisely in aim that his life in every other respect became wholly bereft from 1816 until he set out for Greece at the end. His years so far had been

charged enough with caprice and uncertainty, but they had at least been ordered with something like social design. He had been to a public school and the University, he had done his European tour, he had taken his place as a legislator, he had formed active literary associations, he had begun to take a part in public affairs, as at Drury Lane, and he had married and started a family. In a substantial and responsible manner he had, in spite of all his indiscretions, laid the foundations of a career, and had committed himself in a dozen directions to the ordinary obligations of life. Now in a moment all this was swept away. What might have happened had he lived to return from Greece cannot be told, but as things were he left England in 1816 with the outward order of his life shattered beyond recovery. He wandered aimlessly about Italy, the citizen of no country, bound by no ties, moved by no material ambition. At moments a sense of injustice flamed out in savage and ribald mockery, and he, who was accused of much, flattered the belief that he might properly be accused of more. Sometimes a local cause or quarrel would arrest his attention for a week or two, and in such a companion as Shelley he found an intellectual stimulus that more effectively took him out of himself, while the inspiration of Greece brought into his last days a definite renewal of purpose. For the rest, there is little to record but the anecdotes, a few liaisons of more or less importance, and, above all, the almost demoniac application to poetry. Biographical outline disappears, because continuity no longer has any significance in Byron's story. We find instead spasmodic illustrations of character, here and there a scrap of adventure, the survival of an indomitable wit, and an irradiated gloom of genius and personality.

This does not mean that Byron was broken by the catastrophe of his marriage, or that he fell into an habitual melancholy. It means that the gear of his external life was dislocated, and that his mind had experienced a shock that left its mark. But his high spirits did not desert him, and there were moods in which he looked upon the turn in his fortunes as something like an escape from contention. Writing from Venice in November 1816, he

could say that, having seen something of most things that life had to show and having now but limited if any ambition, he was in a fair way to being not merely happy, but tranquil, which he took to be an even rarer privilege. He had "books, a decent establishment, a fine country, a language which I prefer, as much society as I choose to take, most of the amusements and conveniences of life"; he would not complain of ill luck in losing some things that he had not been shrewd enough to keep; he wished only to get his financial affairs in England settled, and then to be there considered as *posthumous*, for he "would never willingly dwell in the 'tight little Island.'" This satisfaction was to be very far from constant, but it never wholly deserted him.

Byron left England with three servants, including the perennial Fletcher, and he also took with him as travelling physician, at a salary of two hundred pounds a year, John William Polidori, then a young man of twenty-one, whose sister was to become the mother of the Rossettis. Doctor Pollydolly, as Byron called him, is, for all his upstanding good looks, a pathetic little figure. Highly pleased, as he well might be, with his appointment, he applied himself with great zest and no judgment to his duties. Murray, no doubt at Byron's instigation, had promised him five hundred pounds for an account of his travels, and a further sum for a play. The diary was kept, but was not published until nearly a hundred years later. It gives an agreeable but unimportant narrative of the months that he was with Byron, and of his acquaintance with Shelley, with a good deal in the vein of "Saw L. B. at dinner; wrote to my father and Shelley; went in the boat with L. B.; agreed with boatman for English boat. . . . Saw Shelley over again." With some gifts and a not unattractive manner, he pertinaciously got himself into silly scrapes. Jealous about something or another, he wanted to fight a duel with Shelley, but was not allowed to. He hurt his leg by trying to jump something that he couldn't, and became for a time an encumbrance to the party, much to Byron's vexation. The Swiss servant said he lamed the horses, presumably by bad riding, and the few patients he picked up on the journey died

with great unanimity under his treatment. The seductions of travel frequently proved too much for him; in June he wrote in his diary, "Bed at 3 as usual," and in September, after a silence of two months, "Not written my Journal till now through neglect and dissipation." He again quarrelled with Shelley, this time threatening to shoot him in a boat, and he plagued Byron with a succession of complaints that seem to have been borne with uncommon patience. At Geneva he threw a fraudulent apothecary out of the room, and was fined twelve florins for breaking his spectacles. At length Byron grew tired, and paid the volatile physician off, though, as Polidori informs us, "not upon any quarrel, but on account of our not suiting." Later in the year Polidori saw Byron again for a time at Milan, but for interfering with an Austrian soldier on guard one evening in the theatre he was expelled from the town in spite of all protests. Back in England he blundered into letting a ghost story he had written, *The Vampire*, be published as Byron's, and with no wrong intentions landed himself in a false and thoroughly unpleasant position. In 1821 he poisoned himself.

From Ostend, where he landed at the end of April, Byron made his way by slow stages with his little entourage through Switzerland to Geneva, where in June he took the Villa Diodati for the summer. He had first stayed for a few days by the lake in an hotel, where, it is supposed for the first time, he met Shelley, with whom were Mary Godwin and Clare Clairmont. Shelley was later to have a profoundly important influence on Byron's life; at present the acquaintance was no more than a genially casual one, welcome to Byron no doubt largely as a relief from Polidori's rather exacting companionship. But there was already a more personal bond between the two poets in Clare Clairmont. Her part in Byron's story has never been quite clear, and some uncertainty is likely to remain. But we know enough to form a tolerably secure view of a relationship that has been urged more heavily against Byron than seems to be justified.

Clare Clairmont was Mary Godwin's step-sister, the daughter of Godwin's second wife by a former marriage. Born in 1798, she was closely in the confidence of Mary and Shelley, and ac-

companied them on their elopement. She was pretty, daring, high-spirited, and, as is shown by her unpublished journals which Mr. Thomas J. Wise has generously placed at my disposal, of considerable intellectual parts. Her friendship with Shelley encouraged a natural enthusiasm for literature, and she was readily enough a victim of what she is reported to have described in her old age as the "troubling, morbid obsession" that Byron was "especially [to] the youth of England of both sexes." In short, she fell precipitately in love with Byron, and was determined to make his acquaintance. It has generally been supposed that she first did this early in 1816, at the time of the separation, but unfortunately the very remarkable letters in which she made her advances, the earlier ones being clearly written before she knew him, are all undated. In 1898 Mr. William Graham published his *Last Links with Byron, Shelley and Keats*, based on interviews that he had with Clare Clairmont when she was an octogenarian. This book, written in a style of raffish sentimentality that makes it singularly unpleasing to read, purposes to show that Clare met Byron not later than August 1815, that she took him down to see Shelley and Mary at Marlow in that month, that her intrigue with Byron was the direct cause of his separation from his wife, that while she was momentarily infatuated she never really loved Byron, but that, on the other hand, she did love Shelley deeply and with devoted loyalty. These statements, attributed directly to Clare when she was eighty, obviously at once raise a host of questions which fortunately we need not attempt to answer. It may be noted that Jeaffreson had already adopted the view of Clare's responsibility for the separation, but it can hardly survive perusal of the Melbourne correspondence. Otherwise, the point that concerns us is not the date of Clare's meeting with Byron, but the manner in which it was effected. And her letters to him at the time make it unequivocally plain that if ever a woman threw herself at a man's head, she did at Byron's. Writing at first under an assumed name, she professed a desire to become an actress, and asked Byron to use his influence on her behalf at Drury Lane. Then she explained that her ambitions were divided between

the stage and literature, and solicited Byron's critical opinion of a novel that she was writing. That her artistic aspirations were genuine there is no reason to doubt, but her interest in Byron was undisguisedly excited by other considerations. A few phrases from her letters will explain the situation beyond the need of comment. "An utter stranger takes the liberty of addressing you. . . . It may seem a strange assertion, but it is not the less true that I place my happiness in your hands. . . . If a woman, whose reputation has yet remained unstained . . . should throw herself upon your mercy, if with a beating heart she should confess the love she has borne you many years, if she should secure to you secrecy and safety, if she should return your kindness with fond affection and unbounded devotion, could you betray her, or would you be silent as the grave?" This letter she signed, "E. Trefusis," letting Byron know that she was not disclosing her real name. A later note, signed "G. C. B.," asks for an appointment that evening when Byron is to receive a lady who on "business of peculiar importance desires to be admitted alone and with the utmost privacy." The appointment was made, but seems not to have been kept, a further letter from Clare complaining that she has called twice, to be told that he was out of town. She proceeds to discuss her theatrical projects, assures him of her utmost anxiety with regard to his sentiments and opinion of her, and now signs herself Clara Clairmont. The next letter thanks him for an introduction, speaks of Shelley's poetry, and refers to her novel; she begins to fear that Byron, whom she has not yet seen, is growing impatient with her, but no matter, it will make his judgment the less partial. The next day she sends a messenger begging for an answer to the previous letter, then follows another long communication about the novel, which she encloses, though little emboldened to do so by your "lordship's stern silence." At this point she saw Byron, and she next acknowledges a letter from him bidding her to "write short" and telling her that her attachment for him was but a fancy. She continues: "It cannot be a fancy since you have been for the last year the object upon which every solitary moment led me to muse. I do not expect you to love me; I am not worthy of your

love . . . yet to my surprise, more to my happiness, you betrayed passions I had believed no longer alive in your bosom . . . time shall show you that I love gently and with affection. . . . I do assure you your future will shall be mine, and everything you shall do or say, I shall not question. Have you then any objection to the following plan? On Thursday evening we may go out of town together by some stage or mail about the distance of ten or twelve miles. There we shall be free and unknown; we can return early the following morning. I have arranged everything here so that the slightest suspicion may not be excited. Pray do so with your people." She asks to be admitted for two minutes to make these arrangements, and is waiting outside in the street for his answer. A last letter confirms the engagement for Saturday, and is a frank and final declaration of her passion.

The absence of dates from the letters leaves a slight uncertainty as to sequence of these events, but as to nothing else. Clare was determined to get Byron, and she succeeded. Whatever the precise moment of this may have been, there is little doubt that she found him in Switzerland in the summer of 1816 by design, and more by her design than his. When in September Byron wrote to Augusta, "Now don't scold me; but what could I do?—a foolish girl, in spite of all I could say or do, would come after me, or rather went before me—for I found her here and I have had all the plague possible to persuade her to go back again. . . . I could not help this . . . but I could not exactly play the stoic with a woman who had scrambled eight hundred miles to unphilosophise me," he was telling the truth.

How far Clare's "unbounded devotion" survived the trials to which it was put will be shown, and that Byron later behaved questionably about her may be admitted. But if her liaison with Byron turned out in the end miserably enough for her, it must be remembered that it was at first very resolutely of her own unencouraged seeking. She left Switzerland with Shelley and Mary at the end of August, and in the meantime Byron and she lived on terms of more or less open intimacy. He assured Augusta that there was no love in the matter so far as he was

concerned, but Clare was a very attractive person, and she was moreover in many respects an agreeable companion. Byron always professed not to like intelligent women, but Clare's quite well-informed appreciation of literature in general and of his own poetry in particular was, we may be sure, not wholly lost on him at the time, whatever he may have felt about it afterwards. Her diaries show how eager and discriminating a reader she was. Such entries as the following, which with others I quote from her manuscript with Mr. Wise's permission, abound:

August 28*th* [?], 1814 [during her first European tour with Shelley and Mary].—Read *King Richard III* and *King Lear*. Quite horrified. I can't describe my feelings for a moment when Cornwall tears out the eyes of the Duke of Gloster. This play is the most melancholy, and produces almost stupendous despair on the reader—Such refinement in wickedness and cruelty —Lear is exactly what he calls himself—"But I am a fond, foolish old man."—In most of Shakespeare's Plays there are generally secondary Plots and Characters which are rather tiresome than interesting, but in *Lear* there is not a line that does not teem with vigour and energy and awakens fresh anxiety and horror. I think Lear treats Cordelia very ill.

August 30*th*, 1814 [after watching a sunset on the Rhine and the snake-like effect of the waves].—I now thought of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner—"Beyond the shadow of the ship—I watched the water snakes"—I am convinced that the descriptions contained in that Poem are more copied from Nature than one is at first aware of.

August 31*st*, 1814.—Read *King Lear* for a second time.

Sept. 17*th*, 1814—Read the *Lara* of Lord Byron.

German and Italian literature take their place with English in her entries. As a further example of her critical gift it will be convenient to give in this place a note on Byron's poetry written in April 1821. By that time her mind was, indeed, deeply embittered towards him, but the energy of her judgments cannot be denied. The passage has not before been printed.

Sunday, April 15*th*, 1821.

He ne'er is crown'd
With immortality who fears to follow
Where airy voices lead.

It is for this reason that I think L. B.'s poetry will not immortalise him; it is entirely divested of anything pertaining to the aerial voice of imagination, so sensible, so tangible, that, like everything corporeal, it must die. His song is woven of the commonest and grossest elements of our nature: desire, hatred, revenge, a proneness to mischief, spoliation and cruelty, description of these animal appetites, interspersed here and there with an appeal to freedom which, however, a marked animosity to philosophy and virtue render null and void form both the groundwork and superstructure of this Poet's works. They are pictures of animal life, of the sensations which belong to the robust body of a savage whose senses bear a most immoderate preponderance in the sum total of his being. . . . This poet's hand seems too heavy to paint the subtle emotions of the invisible habitant whose ethereal emanations create the grace and poetry of life. . . . Nature, which is the unsubstantial food on which the soul feeds, is as equally neglected by this poet: except one or two passages in a style so totally different that we wonder how they came there, he looks upon her fair adorned breast, not as if it were the bosom of beauty, the pillow upon which the golden locks of poetry should repose, but as so much space allotted for the completion of his desires. Religion, too, with him becomes earthly: she bears him not to the heavenly spaces informing them with beneficence and promises of eternal happiness; he turns her into a demon; the fit companion of his Savage heroes, bending to all their purposes; the Jack Ketch of the Almighty blowing the last trump as a signal to execute an eternal doom of suffering upon criminal myriads: such are his praise offerings to the Creator of Beauty and Goodness, the possessor of never-ending beneficence.

This was written by Clare in her diary for her own satisfaction, and it is hasty in style and prejudiced in temper. But it is remarkable. It shows that Clare was as determined in her mind as in her desires, and it shows moreover that she was very sharp in her perceptions. Her view is a wrong-headed one, and her force is crude, but I do not know that the superficial case against Byron's poetry has ever been put with greater point or vigour than it was on the spot by this girl of twenty-three. Clare had a wit to be reckoned with; too much to be reckoned with, we suspect, for Byron's liking. When, at the end of 1816, having formed a new attachment, he wrote that he was in love with a

very pretty woman who was not a bore and did not annoy him by setting up for a sage we fear that Clare was in retrospect. And when he grew restive her hold upon him was not strengthened by the fact that he could retort, if she should complain of his running away from her, that at least he had never run after her.

Their daughter, Allegra, was born in England on January 12th, 1817, by which time Byron was established in Venice. During the summer and autumn of 1816, we might in general gather from his letters and such documents as Polidori's diary, Byron loafed about the shores of Geneva with occasional excursions into the surrounding country. His letters to England deal briefly with necessary business, and once or twice he asks for news of Ada, imposing on his friends a strict abstention from any other reference to his domestic affairs. Otherwise they consist of traveller's gossip, telling Moore, Rogers, Murray, Augusta, and others of the places and people he had seen on a very casual pilgrimage, generally cheerful and always vivid in tone, with here and there a more sombre note, as "My day is over—What then? I have had it." Of any more serious occupation, or of his new intimacy with Shelley, he gives hardly a sign. In September he was joined by Hobhouse, and they went off together into the mountains for some days, during which Byron kept a journal for Augusta. It is full of alert description, but not otherwise notable, and yet there plays about it a spirit of simple affection that is very touching. "I shall keep a short journal of each day's progress for my Sister Augusta," it begins, in what sounds to me like the accent rather of a lonely child than of a disillusioned cynic of the world; and it closes with "*To* you, dearest Augusta, I send, and *for* you I have kept this record of what I have seen and felt." Returning to Geneva at the end of the month, Byron left Switzerland, still with Hobhouse, early in October, and slowly made his way into Italy. Staying for some days first at Milan and then at Verona, the friends reached Venice on November 11th, whence Hobhouse took his leave at the beginning of December. Here Byron was to live for the next two years and a half.

But although Byron's movements since he left England may have been aimless, his mind had not by any means been so. Three references in his letters enlighten us. On June 23rd he had written to Hobhouse, "Tell Murray I have a 3rd Canto of *Childe Harold* finished." Four days later he sent this information himself to Murray. A single entry in Polidori's diary, on May 4th, supplements our knowledge: "My friend has written twenty-six stanzas to-day—some on Waterloo." As Byron spent this day visiting the battle-field, Polidori no doubt by "written" meant "completed." On August 28th Byron wrote to Murray: "The Manuscript (containing the Third Canto of *Childe Harold*, the 'Castle of Chillon,' etc., etc.) is consigned to the care of my friend Mr. Shelley, who will deliver this letter along with it. Mr. Gifford will perhaps be kind enough to read it over." The "etc., etc." included among other things *The Dream*, *Darkness*, and *Churchill's Grave*. Shelley thus took back with him to England something like two thousand lines of his friend's verse written between April and August. In much of this work the quality shows that Byron had splendidly come into his maturity as a poet.

In September Murray reported to Byron that Gifford was enthusiastic about *Childe Harold* (III), as well he might be. "Never did I see him so heartily pleased," and "he says that what you have published before is nothing to this effort." The poem, indeed, shows Byron in the full exercise of a ripened power. Opening, as it closes, with an invocation to his daughter Ada, he uses the same machinery as in the earlier cantos:

> In my youth's summer I did sing of One,
> The wandering outlaw of his own dark mind;
> Again I seize the theme. . . .

The mood of the poem, however, is set to a darkly enriched experience and a new disposition:

> Self-exiled Harold wanders forth again,
> With nought of Hope left—but with less of gloom. . . .

And—

> There is a very life in our despair,
> Vitality of poison—a quick root
> Which feeds these deadly branches; for it were
> As nothing did we die; but Life will suit
> Itself to Sorrow's most detested fruit. . . .

Into the poem he put his suffering, his accusation, and, in some measure, a psychological defence of himself, and, not least, his unquestionable courage. It may be possible, though for myself I do not see on what grounds, to question the taste and discretion of the work, but no one can question its honesty or fail to admire its spirit. If Byron allows himself that psychological defence, there is no note of moping or whining excuse. And his command of the verse has become superb. Some traces of the old faults remain, an occasional looseness of phrase, carelessness in the choice of a word, cacophonies; but they now hardly disturb the flow of full-volumed mastery. Byron's themes are Waterloo, Napoleon, the scenery and historic associations of the Rhine, Rousseau, and Voltaire, brought together in a lyrical framework of his own emotions. The design is none the less firm for its freedom; Byron's natural discursiveness is now managed with a much surer art than before. Above all, the poetic inspiration itself has gained immensely in force and richness. Unless we succumb to the weak-mindedness that fears anything in art that has secured a wide popular esteem, we must be moved by such passages as "There was a sound of revelry by night" and "The castled crag of Drachenfels" when read for the tenth or the fiftieth time. And the beauties that we find in these are characteristic of the poem as a whole. Here are no magic casements, but in the poetry of lucid and unaffected sense Byron now proclaimed himself a great master. *Childe Harold* (III), while it had not the imaginative intensity that was being renewed in poetry by some of Byron's contemporaries, had a romantic warmth that marked him clearly enough as of the new spirit, and in combining this with the forthright sagacity just mentioned it came more nearly perhaps than any other masterpiece of the

time to reconciling the great manner of the eighteenth century with that of the early nineteenth. It was small wonder that Shelley, having read it, should exclaim, "Having produced thus much, with effort, as you are aware very disproportionate to the result, what are you not further capable of effecting?"

The Prisoner of Chillon, which Murray announced as being published simultaneously with the third canto of *Childe Harold*, shows a corresponding advance in executive power. It is rather lyrical than narrative, which is no loss, since in spite of Byron's fondness for the story as a poetic form he was not by any means uniformly successful in making his narrative structure interesting in itself. His strength lies in the observation of character, in wit, in the presentation of vivid incident, in emotional ardour, but not in contriving narrative action in arresting and continuous outline. *The Prisoner of Chillon* is independent of this last appeal, and is a beautifully written monologue. Somewhat unexpectedly it has some passages that anticipate the Pre-Raphaelitism of a generation later. This might almost be by Morris, or even by the young Tennyson.

I heard the torrents leap and gush
O'er channelled rock and broken bush;
I saw the white-walled distant town,
And whiter sails go skimming down;
And then there was a little isle
Which in my very face did smile,
  The only one in view;
A small green isle, it seemed no more,
Scarce broader than my dungeon floor,
But in it there were three tall trees,
And o'er it blew the mountain breeze,
And by it there were waters flowing,
And on it there were young flowers growing,
  Of gentle breath and hue.
The fish swam by the castle wall,
And they seemed joyous, each and all. . . .

While Byron was at work this summer, Clare acted as his amanuensis, making fair copies of the new *Childe Harold*, *The*

Prisoner of Chillon, and some of the shorter pieces, among them the *Monody on Sheridan*, which was published separately. These smaller poems are worthy of Byron's matured gifts. *The Epistle to Augusta* is perhaps the most memorable of them. It was withheld from publication until 1830; like *The Dream*, and less agreeably, it has busied some people for other than its poetical interest.

2

On arriving at Venice in November 1816, Byron took lodgings at the house of a linen-draper named Segati, whose wife Marianna was twenty-one years old, with an agreeable voice, a light and pretty figure, dark eyes and glossy hair, and in general appearance endowed with all the good gifts of nature. This was the lady who pleased Byron by not setting up for a sage. Jeaffreson, whose book on Byron suffers from a generally feverish style, nevertheless makes many happy points. "As the merchant," he says of Segati, "had fewer customers and less credit than he needed for his affairs, he was sufficiently prudent to give his shop more attention than he gave his wife." His prudence was Byron's advantage, as well as his own, and for sixteen months Marianna was the poet's mistress by an arrangement that was then a commonplace in all ranks of Italian society. Byron refers to her constantly in his letters with unaffected pleasure. She was beautiful, sensible without intellectual pretensions, very fond of him without being too exacting, and, so far as we can judge, really considerate for him in her attentions. Byron's detractors have seen in this liaison the first downward step into what they are pleased to call the filthy sty of his Venetian life. I think that the whole story of that life has been highly overcoloured, largely by Byron himself, and in any case this interpretation of his affair with Marianna is merely a libel on one who seems to have been, according to accepted standards, a very admirable young woman. Byron is supposed to have been flaunting his shame in being seen openly at public assemblies with a tradesman's wife. This again is nonsense; Byron had

little reason to consider the social etiquette of Venice, and he took Marianna out with him simply because he liked doing so and enjoyed her company. Enough by now has been told to show that a succession of love-intrigues was a necessity of Byron's nature. If we like to take the view that he is, therefore, outside our interest, we may do so; but, if we accept him at all, we have to do so upon those terms. And within Byron's own convention, if we may put it that way, his relation with Marianna Segati was by no means the least sincere or the least creditable of his entanglements. It was probably the most peaceful of all his affairs with women, not excepting that with Lady Oxford. Byron used to say that Marianna reminded him of an antelope in her gentle and soothing ways. And gentle she was, much to his comfort, though, in order to keep the situation from becoming slack, she greeted a somewhat forward and pretty young sister-in-law, whom she unexpectedly found in Byron's company, with sixteen decisive slaps on the face. On another occasion she engaged a rival, Margarita Cogni, of whom more presently, in an altercation that nearly became a public brawl. For the rest, her intimacy with Byron seems to have been an untroubled one, and to have ended as quietly as it began.

The period during which they were together was externally an uneventful one for Byron. The "great regularity" into which he told Moore in December 1816 his way of life had fallen was in fact much more steadily maintained than superstition has realised. It is true that at Carnivals and on such occasions he allowed himself indulgences of which he rather fussily made the most of in his letters to his friends in England. But if, after some festival of the sort, he boasted that he had not been in bed before three in the morning for a month we are not bound to conclude that he had given himself up to a life of unrestrained debauchery. "The mumming closed with a masked ball at Venice, where I went, as also to most of the ridottos, etc., etc., and, though I did not dissipate much upon the whole, yet I find 'the sword wearing out the scabbard' though I have but just turned the corner of twenty-nine." So he wrote to Moore at the

end of February 1817. Other young men have felt like that at twenty-nine, and lived to be a robust seventy and more; but they have not often brought confession to so energetic a conclusion as Byron did in this letter, that lights suddenly on one of the loveliest of his lyrics:

> So we'll go no more a roving
> So late into the night,
> Though the heart be still as loving,
> And the moon be still as bright.

How significantly active this energy then was will be seen a little later.

Byron's correspondence at this time contains little to our purpose, which, it may be repeated, is to present his complexity in as simple an outline as possible. He wrote frequently to Hanson, Murray, Moore, Hobhouse, and Kinnaird on business and literary topics, scolding them for taking no notice of him, urging expedition in the sale of Newstead, asking for news, and embellishing his letters with scraps of social and philosophical gossip. His occasional seriousness of protest serves but to enliven the general gaiety with which he writes, and even his complaints are mostly made in the pervading good humour for which he has never been given full credit. He needs money, and has been bothered by delays; he tells Kinnaird to make Hanson and Murray settle accounts, as, though he is in cash, he does not want to encroach upon reserves, so "look to my finance department, and, above all, *don't lecture me*, for I won't bear it, and will run savage." He wrote, affectionately as always, to Augusta, though he told her that he could not understand a word of her letters—a difficulty the explanation of which the reader will have found in an earlier chapter of this book; and once he wrote to Lady Byron about Ada in terms that also have already been discussed. Otherwise he still banned the subject of his life with her. "You talk of 'marriage,'" he wrote to Murray; "ever since my own funeral, the word makes me giddy, and throws me into a cold sweat. Pray, don't repeat it." He applied himself seriously to learning the Armenian language, going regularly for

lessons to a friar, whom he assisted in publishing an English-Armenian grammar.

He sometimes played with the idea of making a brief return to England, thinking that his business affairs would benefit if he did, and that it would be pleasant to see Moore again, and one or two others of his friends; but an aversion to the project always reasserted itself at once. In the spring of 1817 he caught a slow fever and was ill for several weeks, during which Marianna nursed him, as he records, with devotion and tenderness. At the end of April he visited Rome, where he met Hobhouse again. It was while he was there that he sat to Thorwaldsen for the famous bust. He rode about the city daily on horseback, "bothering over its marvels," and passing its history in review with his eager mind. But he was "wretched" at being away from Marianna, and at the end of three weeks he returned to Venice. On the way back he wrote to Augusta that he had heard of the birth of Clare Clairmont's daughter. This information he had received in a letter from Mary Shelley, as she had now become. He told Augusta that when this event took place the mother was in England, adding, "I pray the Gods to keep her there."

Back at Venice, he took a country villa at La Mira, outside the town. Here he spent much of his time, in Marianna's company, employed with what industry we shall see. Nothing in these days was spectacular in his life; just an incident occurs here and there to break the even flow of habit, as when a passing stranger threw an aimless insult at him and Byron pulled the offender out of his chaise and soundly boxed his ears. In the winter he went back into Venice, living for a time again with the Segatis. In the middle of March 1818, however, his affection for Marianna had worn itself out, and we find him established at the Palazzo Mocenigo, of which he had taken a lease for three years.

It is from this moment until the beginning of his intimacy with the Countess Guiccioli, a little more than a year later, that Byron is traditionally supposed to have sunk into his lowest depths of depravity. It is certain that during that time he was held by no continuous attraction; it may be assumed, with equal

certainty, that he did not suddenly display a continence unexampled in his character. But we may allow so much without committing ourselves to those excesses of credulity that are as little to be admired as the excesses that they reprobate. Byron talked freely enough at this time of his irregularities; but it was now and always Byron's way to tell everybody everything about himself. An habitual toss-pot who says nothing about his indulgences may very well keep a reputation for sobriety; while the most abstemious man if he should twice in six months tell all his friends that he had been drunk might easily enough set all tongues wagging. Byron confessed and repented in his letters of this date with the easiest air in the world. But there is a reasonable course between attributing this volubility merely to a sense of rather unpleasant mischief, and accepting the interpretations commonly put upon it. There is nothing but speculative gossip to authorise the reports that Byron was engaged in daily orgies, or that his associates were drabs picked up in the cellars and wineshops of Venice. On the other hand, we know a great deal to discountenance all such sensational views. Nothing that Byron himself says supports them. He did indeed go as far as to speak to Murray of two years in the course of which he had been familiar with more women than he can count, but we suspect the statement to have had as little regard for truth as for the other decencies. It is no part of our purpose either to deny or to excuse the irresponsible laxity of the middle period of Byron's Venetian life; but it is an error to confuse this with the daily habit of debauchery that has become a tradition. That he was the mark of scandal no one will dispute, but this was no new circumstance in his life, and scandal is, inconvenient as the fact may be, not notably a secure basis for history. Shelley, it is true, was among the censors. In writing to Peacock in December 1818, he attributes what he somewhat wildly calls the "most wicked and mischievous insanity" of the fourth canto of *Childe Harold* to the fact that "the Italian women with whom [Byron] associates are perhaps the most contemptible of all who exist under the moon—the most ignorant, the most disgusting, the most bigoted . . . the people his gondolieri pick up in the street."

Dismayed at his own degradation, says Shelley, how can Byron but behold the nature of man as contemptible in the mirror of himself? Shelley's logic for once here seems a little to seek, but we know that he had a genuine regard for Byron and that whatever he said was not said in malice. His statement, however, is the most direct and important evidence of its kind that we have, and it must be examined.

In April 1818 the Shelleys, with Clare and Allegra, had returned to Italy, residing first at Milan. In the same month Allegra was sent to Byron at Venice, in circumstances that will be explained later. At the end of August Shelley saw Byron in Venice, this being the first meeting of the poets since the summer of 1816. Shelley's object was to make some satisfactory arrangement for Clare with regard to Allegra, but that the conference was not very successful will be seen. Byron, however, offered the Shelleys, and Clare with them, the use of a villa that he had now taken at Este, some fifty miles inland from Venice, south of Padua, and the invitation was accepted. Towards the end of September Shelley visited Venice with Mary and on the 25th he saw Byron again. The Shelleys stayed with Hoppner, who was British Consul at Venice, and his wife, and in less than a week went back to Este. Byron and Shelley had exchanged calls, their discussions turning largely on Clare and Allegra, whose affairs were again chiefly the occasion of Shelley's presence. So that, in August, Shelley had seen Byron for one afternoon; in September for some hours, perhaps, on four successive days. From October 12th to the 24th he was again in Venice, and Dowden tells us that he then "passed several evenings with Byron at his palazzo on the Grand Canal." [1] His impressions of Byron in August had been wholly favourable; in December they had suffered a violent change, as is seen by the letter to Peacock. We may suppose that those evenings in October were partly responsible for this, but we have again to be very cautious in accepting even Shelley's word as first-hand evidence of the habitual debauchery of which we have spoken. For myself, I

[1] *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley.* By Edward Dowden. 1886. Vol. ii, p. 235.

have a strong feeling that Shelley, in his letter to Peacock, was as much inspired by common and unreliable gossip as by his own knowledge. He was by no means proof against such seductions. On his first visit to Venice in August he had listened to fantastic stories from Byron's boatman, and reported them to Mary. Also he was distressed to receive accounts from the Hoppners that only too well confirmed most of the rumours that were current, though it is Hoppner himself who records that the eagerness with which all classes of travellers "endeavoured to pick up any anecdotes of [Byron's] mode of life were carried to a length which will hardly be credited," and that this inquisitiveness was commonly edified by "the most extravagant and often unfounded stories." Shelley was, in short, as easily impressed as most other people by the sensational reports that Byron was at no pains to contradict even to his friends. There is no question of Shelley's good faith in all this; but there is question of his reliability. What he did see of Byron, after the August meeting, was enough, no doubt, to lend colour to scandal, and especially in a mind such as his own. In Mary's journal there is a significant entry, dated September 27th: "Call at Lord Byron's and see the Fornarina."

The Fornarina was Margarita Cogni, the young wife of a butcher, a magnificent creature of entirely uncontrollable passions, Jeaffreson's "blackguard in petticoats," and by far the least reputable of Byron's favourites. He found her when his affair with Marianna Segati was drawing to a close, and the newcomer, after one trial of strength, was content to leave her predecessor with her honours for as much longer as she could hold them, which was for some months. The Fornarina, indeed, was never on any established footing with Byron, but relied with superb confidence on her attractions to captivate him when and as often as she liked. She came and went at the Mocenigo Palace at her pleasure, and terrorised every one in the establishment but Byron himself. Even he found her formidable enough. She opened his letters in the mere delight of jealousy, though she could not read English or any other language, she railed at him with orchestral fury, she beat any woman she saw about the house, and was apt at demonstration with a knife. For a time

she installed herself as Byron's housekeeper, without his leave, and employed methods that at least reduced his domestic bills to less than half and kept the house in material if not in emotional order. But, in Byron's words, "she became quite ungovernable," and when at last he told her she must go, she screamed herself into a frenzy and jumped into the canal; from which, however, she allowed herself to be rescued without difficulty. The Fornarina was, in fact, the symbol of Byron's Venetian depravity. But that she was merely one in a licentious mob there is no reason to suppose; she was probably alone in her kind. The gondoliers and the more exalted gossips of Venice could be trusted to add freely to the number, and Byron would let it go at that.

But when Shelley saw the Fornarina on that evening there was no disguising what she was. And this was precisely the sort of thing that Shelley could neither stand nor understand. His own moral standards were liberal enough, and intolerance was a sin against his gospel. But freedom in these matters meant for him an almost desperately idealised responsibility about women. To love deeply enough was to excuse all, but without such love he did not conceive it possible that there should be anything to excuse. When Hogg attempted to seduce Harriet, Shelley forgave him, not because he was indifferent, but because he was convinced that there must have been a great spiritual attraction between them. Shelley, splendidly competent as he otherwise was in the conduct of life, in these things was at once exquisitely pure and almost incredibly silly. His first glimpse of Byron with the Fornarina brought him for a moment into contact with a world of which he knew nothing by experience, and for which he could imagine no explanation but entire moral collapse, from which he could only pray that his friend might recover. His further visits in October no doubt heightened this impression, though he may very well have done no more than see the Fornarina again. It may be questioned whether his transcendental philosophy about love was more successful in the practical enonomy of the world's happiness than Byron's promiscuous levity, but we are sure that, when he found the friend

and the poet whom he so admired behaving as though love were no more than a mere convenience of the appetites, he was sincerely shocked. And, under the influence of the shock, he was quite capable of deceiving himself as to what the facts really were.

Of moral instability then, there is no attempt to acquit Byron at this, or indeed at any other, period of his life. But that the utter carnal degradation reported from Venice is anything but the invention of credulous gossip, fed by Byron's own caprice and misplaced vanity, we submit that there is nothing to show. People are ready to believe the most unlikely stories of offence, who yet at once dismiss similarly unlikely stories of credit as manifest impostures. There is a delightful pamphlet, published in 1824, entitled *Narrative of Lord Byron's Voyage to Corsica and Sardinia during the Summer and Autumn of the Year* 1821. It professes to be told from the journal of Captain Benson, in command of Byron's yacht, *The Mazeppa*. The voyage took five months, during which Byron and a number of his friends, Shelley among them, visited various places in the Mediterranean. Byron, travelling part of the time as Lord Newstead, with a lady who is clearly the Guiccioli as Lady Newstead, was engaged in establishing in Corsica the rights of a young nobleman who had been entrusted to his care by a dying mother. Byron appears throughout in the full panoply of generous heroism. He dispenses charity in all the villages, bestows dowries on peasant lovers, saves a dying lady of his party by his medical skill when the doctor has failed, walks eighteen miles in a day over rough country on a shooting expedition, and is everywhere saluted by batteries as he passes, now by seven guns, now by nine, now by twelve. He visits a Turkish frigate, and, out of respect to the Ottoman flag, dons full Turkish uniform; "beard," we are told, "he wore none, but the Marchioness (Guiccioli) fixed on his upper lip a pair of mustaches made of her own hair." The great scene is a storm at sea, with the ship apparently doomed. Byron, assured that there is no hope, throws off everything but his trousers, and sits down with folded arms to await the end, Shelley lying at his feet in a paroxysm of prayer and terror.

The danger is averted, and, while the men are making sail, Byron calls upon them silently to thank God for their miraculous preservation. Shelley is removed in a state of stupor to his bed, but on recovering falls back at once into his infidel habits of mind, much to Byron's grief. Later Shelley, Percy S.—as he is called in the narrative—again narrowly escapes drowning, only, we are told, to meet that fate two years later on the coast of Tuscany. This diverting farrago of nonsense is presented with perfect seriousness, and there is no suspicion of irony in it. But, apart from the facts that there was no such yacht and that throughout the specified months Byron and Shelley were demonstrably elsewhere, nobody would be deceived by the fiction for a moment. And yet it is supported far more circumstantially than the Venetian tales that are so eagerly accepted. We are told where Byron received his letters, exactly how the ship was furnished, where they took in supplies, how and by whom they were received at places of call, and a hundred other things that have as little the mark of invention on them as the incident of Byron and his trousers.[1] But the essential falsity of the figures given as Byron and Shelley discredits the whole thing at a glance, in spite of its wealth of plausibly contrived evidence. It seems not too much to ask that improbabilities of another complexion should be as readily discredited, when there is no such evidence at all.

We have now to see why the more lurid accounts of Venice are, in the absence of plain proof, decided improbabilities. No man can indulge in constant and heavy excesses for something over twelve months without showing the results in appearance and in depleted energy. Moreover, such indulgence in itself takes up a great deal of time. It is, therefore, important to know what Byron looked like at the end of 1818, in what repair his energy stood, and what demands had been made on his time during the previous year or so other than those of dissipation.

In the middle of November Newton Hanson, the lawyer's son, made the following note when he had just seen Byron in Venice: "Lord Byron could not have been more than thirty, but he looked

[1] He always kept his trousers on when swimming; one contemporary account says he also wore gloves in the water.

forty. His face had become pale, bloated, and sallow. He had grown very fat, his shoulders broad and round, and the knuckles of his hands were lost in fat." This is a bad start, but the Hansons, father and son, were not very welcome visitors at Venice, for a variety of reasons, and Byron let it be known through Fletcher that he did not mind how soon they left. Hanson senior had, in fact, not done many things that Byron considered should have been done, and he wanted to talk about the things of which Byron least wished to hear. Byron was nervy and uncomfortable, and probably showed the worst of himself. The Hansons left none too well pleased with their reception, and it was no doubt some satisfaction to invest their not very conciliating host with the worst features of public report. We can hear the conversation on the homeward journey. "How ill Lord Byron looks." "Yes, indeed: quite debauched." "I fear these detrimental stories must be true." "A thousand pities; and only thirty." "He looks forty." "I must say he isn't very gracious." "No." And out would come Newton's note-book. Only a month before, Shelley had written: "I saw Lord Byron, and really hardly knew him again; he is changed into the liveliest and happiest-looking man I ever met." This leaves Shelley's view of Byron at the time in other respects unmodified, but on the score of appearance it may at least be allowed to cancel out with Newton Hanson. And we have another indication of the truth. About this time George Henry Harlow, a portrait painter of considerable talent, made a drawing of Byron in Venice. It is well known, and has latterly been used as a frontispiece to the fourth volume of Mr. Coleridge's edition of the poems. Two things in it are notable. When every allowance has been made for flattery, the portrait has the stamp of veracity upon it; that, we are convinced, is what Byron looked like as he sat before Harlow. And it in no way tallies with Newton Hanson's description. The modelling of the face is firm, the features cleanly cut, and the eye keen. No compromising with truth could have converted the ravages of dissolution into this finely balanced and eager profile. Byron is, indeed, obviously groomed for the occasion, but, even so, you cannot groom out all traces of such a life as we

are asked to believe he was habitually leading at the time. And it has been my good fortune to find a lithograph of another drawing done by the same artist at the same time. It was afterwards engraved by Scriven, presumably for some publication, but I cannot trace where it appeared, and to most readers it will be unknown. It is reproduced here. Dated by Byron himself in 1818 at Venice, apparently on August 6th, it has points of great interest. The features, in a different pose, resemble those of the other drawing exactly. But the hair, instead of being in the familiar tight curls, now lies on the head in soft loose wisps, beautifully drawn, and clearly from life. The assumption must be that this sketch was done as it were with Byron in his pyjamas, before he had been valeted for the day by Fletcher. And here Harlow's testimony is conclusive. If Byron, when this drawing was made, was living in the depths of profligacy, he did not look it. The portrait, though it misses the robuster qualities of Byron, seems to me to be one of the most charming of all his likenesses, with a curious reminiscence in it of Shelley.

And of Byron's energy at this time? In February 1818 he writes to Moore: "Talking of horses, I have transported my own, four in number, to the Lido, a trip of some ten miles along the Adriatic, a mile or two from the city; so that I not only get a row in my gondola, but a spanking gallop of some miles daily along a firm and solitary beach . . . the which contributes considerably to my health and spirits." As long as he was in Venice he continued these rides, generally accompanied by Hoppner. On June 15th he told Hobhouse that he had been swimming with three friends, among them an Italian who was famous for his powers in the water, and that none of them could stay with him for even half the distance. Ten days later he and Scott, another Englishman, took the Italian on again; they both left him five hundred yards behind before reaching the Grand Canal. Scott went on to the Rialto, and was then taken into his gondola, while Byron completed the length of the canal, having swum four and a half miles at a stretch and having been in the sea altogether for just on four hours. This exercise also he took regularly. So that the indications of a debilitated physique do not appear.

And of the claims upon his time? Here is the pith of the matter. He went to balls and carnivals, it is true, he rode and made excursions into the country, he was an intermittent visitor at some of the more fashionable salons of Venice, he wrote quantities of letters, he had attentions to pay to his Segatis and Fornarinas. He dealt, according to Hoppner, with a weekly list of pensioners in small sums, and he was always ready to send a note home enquiring perhaps after Joe Murray's welfare at Newstead or lamenting Lady Melbourne's death. He kept a menagerie in the cellar, two monkeys, a fox, and a wolf, as well as a number of dogs; presently he had a civet-cat, but it scratched the monkey's cheek and ran away; at another time there were two cats, a hawk, and a crow. He read everything in current literature that he could get sent out to him, and reviewed it to his friends in a running commentary. Through all this his correspondence maintained not only the good humour that has been remarked, but a magnificent intellectual spirit. He chaffed his friends, told them to be damned when they displeased him, and clung tenaciously to a few old associations in spite of all disclaimers. But, when some less personal question arose, he attacked it with unfailing sagacity. Nothing, for example, could be more to the point than this: "It is no disgrace to Mr. Southey to have written *Wat Tyler*, and afterwards to have written his birthday or Victory ode . . . ; but it is something, for which I have no words, for this man to have endeavoured to bring to the stake . . . men who think as he thought, and for no reason but they think so still, when he has found it convenient to think otherwise." Detraction can never impair the essential nobility of a mind that conceived in those terms. And his letters are full of this kind of thing; familiar English prose on the whole has probably never seen wit so splendidly informed with passion as it is in Byron's correspondence at his prime. And, to conclude what is but a preamble, he was persevering in his Armenian studies at this time, he had Allegra on his hands in Italy, two estates and some tattered domestic ties in England. On the whole, for a man of thirty who was said to be very diligently going to

the devil, this might be supposed in the sum to represent a reasonably active life.

But what that life was really achieving we shall now see. Between his arrival in Venice and the beginning of 1819, when his intimacy with the Countess Guiccioli is accepted, even by his detractors, as having effected some reform in him, Byron wrote, the approximate date and length of each poem being given:

Manfred. October 1816-May 1817, 1,400 lines.
The Lament of Tasso. April 1817, 250 lines.
Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Canto IV. June 1817, 1,700 lines.
Beppo. September-October 1817, 800 lines.
Ode on Venice. July 1818, 160 lines.
Mazeppa. 1818, 870 lines.
Don Juan, Cantos I-II. September 1818-July 1819, 3,640 lines.

In two years and a half, therefore, he composed nearly nine thousand lines of verse, the bulk of which are at the very height of his achievement. The inferences are too obvious to need labouring. Had he done nothing of this, the grosser Venetian legends would be questionable at least; in view of the summary above given they become ridiculous, in which condition it could be hoped that they might be for ever left.

Manfred and the first cantos of *Don Juan* will be mentioned in another place. *The Lament of Tasso* and the *Ode on Venice* are of secondary importance in Byron's more assured manner. *Mazeppa* is unexpectedly interesting as a story, but, while it again belongs to a period of teeming inspiration, it invites no comment. The fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, however, must here be considered briefly. Shelley quarrelled with its philosophy, but his objection no longer impresses us. Byron was something at odds with the world, and he now vented his dissatisfaction plainly, as was his use; we need apply no subtler metaphysic than that.

> We wither from our youth, we gasp away—
> Sea-sick; unfound the boon, unslaked the thirst,
> Though to the last, in verge of our decay,
> Some phantom lures, such as we sought at first—

> But all too late,—so are we doubly curst.
> Love, Fame, Ambition, Avarice—'tis the same,
> Each idle—and all ill—and none the worst—
> For all are meteors with a different name,
> And Death the sable smoke where vanishes the flame.

The poem maintains the ease of the third canto, and even excels it. The themes are Venice and Rome with their history, projected again into Byron's own emotional context. Hobhouse, to whom the canto is dedicated, published in 1818 a stout volume of *Historical Illustrations* of the work. These notes are a monument to Hobhouse's industry, and, especially if they are read in conjunction with the poem as they were meant to be, they give a not inconsiderable survey of Italian history in early times. If we study them not very deliberately, we at least have Byron's own example before us; on being challenged as to their accuracy he defended himself by saying that he had never read them.

It is difficult to believe that anybody with an unabused love of poetry can read through the third and fourth cantos of *Childe Harold* without realising happily that Byron was one of the major energies of English verse. Passage after passage in this concluding canto swells out with a volume and compass that I am glad to confess, after twenty years and more, still sweep me off my feet. His must be a rich intelligence indeed whose delights are always above this level. Let us take, as it were, but some of the cues of excellence: "I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs," "In Venice Tasso's echoes are no more, And silent rows the songless gondolier," "The spouseless Adriatic mourns her Lord," "Oh, for one hour of blind old Dandolo," "Before St. Mark still glow his Steeds of brass," "The Moon is up, and yet it is not night," "Th' Acroceraunian mountains of old name," "The Niobe of nations! there she stands," "The seal is set.—Now welcome, thou dread Power," "And here the buzz of eager nations ran," "I see before me the Gladiator lie," "Oh! that the Desert were my dwelling-place," "There is a pleasure in the pathless woods," "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll!" "Time writes no wrinkles on thine azure brow,"—disparagement of Byron as a poet in the face of such an inventory or index gathered at ran-

dom from a single poem is surely not to be taken seriously. And to suppose that such a work was achieved by a ruined spirit or a degenerate mind is to outrage nature.

Beppo is by many critics esteemed as one of Byron's happiest efforts. As a worthy prelude to the mood and manner of *Don Juan* it has a distinguished place in his work; but, as a matter of personal taste, I do not find that its merits are more decisive than that. "If *Beppo* pleases," wrote Byron to Murray in April 1818, "you shall have more in a year or two in the same mood." Moore liked it, and Byron, by its general success, was encouraged to his far greater experiment in the same vein. Shelley, on hearing the first canto of *Don Juan*, fitly described it as a "thing in the style of *Beppo*, but infinitely better."

Byron often said that he regarded work only as an escape from the circumstances of his life. Work, clearly, was more than this for him; but his assertion was true so far as it went. The rate at which he had been devising this escape during the past two years or so had left its mark; also it showed plainly how desperate a necessity the escape was. We need to invest his life at Venice neither with a melancholic gloom nor with the stench of debauchery to realise that it was a profoundly unsatisfactory business. With his inimitable spirit he put a bold front on it, and he made the most of daily occasion. But what was to come of it all? Never was a life more senselessly adrift than Byron's was now. And he could do nothing about it. He could fill up the days with a hand-to-mouth sort of routine, he had his publishing and other business to deal with, and he could make something of his responsibilities about Allegra and the latest liaison. But, in the way of a purpose that might satisfy a rational being and give him self-respect, it all amounted to nothing. That is what Byron, under his air of defiant levity, was tragically beginning to feel himself in the scheme of society: nothing. "I have not the least idea where I am going, nor what I am to do." In the midst of his drolleries to Moore the cry comes out of his soul. And so he worked, worked, worked, partly for delight and partly to save himself. As a poet he had the world's attention still, and that was one incentive at least. But a man cannot live by poetry

alone, and outside poetry he seemed not to be living with any aim at all. The situation really was rather desperate; in fact, what the devil *was* he to do? In this mood he found Teresa, Countess Guiccioli, and in a measure she solved his difficulty for the next four years.

3

Not that she filled his life, or lent it emotional security. No woman could have done that, but for four years the Guiccioli was at least a fixed idea round which his life could revolve, a resource against his own instability. Teresa was, I suspect, a woman of more quality and character than history has commonly realised. When Byron met her she was twenty years of age, having been married at sixteen to a wealthy Romagnese nobleman more than forty years older than herself. The marriage, naturally enough, meant nothing to her, the institution of the *cavalière servente* was a recognised one in her society, and here was Byron, tired, as he said, of promiscuity, and extraordinarily attractive. She fell in love with him, and I think he fell in love with her. He talked at times as though this was not so, but then he talked at times as though everything was not so that was. Leigh Hunt, whose evidence is quite untrustworthy, as will be seen, said that there was no love on either side, but the facts are against him. Shelley was explicit that the connection had been Byron's salvation, and Moore was much of the same mind, though he prudently thought the arrangement imprudent. Byron's own letters to the Guiccioli have a strain of unequivocal affection such as we hardly find elsewhere in his correspondence, and it survived until the last days in Greece. When she was ill he wrote in serious distress to Murray that he did not know what he should do if she died, and he told Lady Blessington that he loved her, that she had sacrificed everything for him, and that, if they could be married, he was sure that they would be "cited as an example of conjugal happiness." Moreover, Teresa seems to have kept him in something like order, greatly to his advantage. He had on the whole a more genuine and lasting respect for her

than he had for any other woman in his life, if we except Augusta, and she inspired in him a new and very salutary sense of responsibility. He might become restive at intervals, and sometimes he chafed at the spectacle of himself as a fan-carrier, but there is little doubt that in his heart he knew how good this fair-complexioned, sentimental, intelligent Italian was for him, and was glad that her beauty made it so easy to preserve a daily habit of loyalty that was for the first time supplying a poignant need in his life.

In 1868 the Countess Guiccioli published her *Recollections of Lord Byron*, a book of some seven hundred pages, an English translation of which appeared in the following year. Unfortunately, she relied little on her own knowledge and observation, and so missed the chance of leaving us what might have been a classic study. The volume is an uncompromising eulogy, supported by no literary graces. Beyond an irrepressible touch of jealousy when she is talking of other women, as of Caroline Lamb, who, it seems, tried to have Byron assassinated, and of Clare Clairmont, whom we are told Byron spent all his time in Switzerland trying to avoid, the book is admirably free from faults of temper. It is immensely painstaking, but written on so tedious a plan as to be followed only by great perseverance; if, indeed, it can be said to have a plan at all. Chapter follows chapter on "Qualities of Lord Byron's Heart," "His Benevolence and Kindness," "His Constancy," "His Qualities and Virtues of Soul," "His Generosity," "His Courage and Fortitude"—and so on, hardly any one of which is distinguishable from any other. But, tedious as the book is, we feel all the time that it is by no means a tedious woman who is writing it. Wholly disordered as they are, and buried in forests of tautology, we discern nevertheless the acumen and cultivated intelligence that Byron attributed to her. When her book appeared the Guiccioli was a woman of sixty who had not worn well; her beauty had gone many years before, and so early as 1837 she was described by a stranger as thick-set, devoid of air or style, a "fubsy" woman. But in 1819 she was, by all accounts, not less than pretty, while some witnesses would make her lovely; and she was well read in Italian

poetry, with a knowledge of French and English. Also, she seems to have been an enthusiastic theologian, which of all unlikely recommendations was one that was by no means lost on Byron, who had a natural turn for disputation so long as it did not soar off into Shelley's metaphysics. It is this girl, self-possessed but far from cold, quietly sure of her own attractions, unpretentiously well informed, shrewd in her judgments, with a queer kind of liberal austerity in morals and a real but quite enlightened devotion to Byron, that we can trace behind the confusion of her *Recollections*. She bored Byron often enough, no doubt, but she kept him far longer than any one else was able to do, he respected her claims as he had done no others, and she made his last years the least convulsed of his life. And it must be added that, in bringing him to this relative composure, she sapped none of his poetic energy. That remained unimpaired.

Not that the turbulence of Byron's life was, or ever would be, wholly quelled. It was too deeply seated for that, and it is doubtful whether even a victorious return from Greece could have guided him into anything like a settled tranquillity of mind. Regeneration of that kind would have taken years to accomplish, even supposing him to have been constitutionally capable of it at all. As it is, Byron remains always a restless, warring, frustrated spirit, conscious almost from his birth of some forbidden land. Delight, success, power, virtues of heart and mind—these he knew in abundance, but peace he always missed. It seemed now to have drifted finally beyond his reach, if not beyond his will. The most he could hope for was a respite from that everlasting but inconstant tattoo upon his passions, and this the Guiccioli helped him to find. Probably no one could have done more, and it is certain that no one else did as much. To care at all for Byron is, I think, to be grateful to her for more than we now can know.

The first move was in April 1819, when they renewed a formal acquaintance at a party in Venice, and found each other interesting. For a time they met daily, until the countess went with her husband to their home at Ravenna. Early in June news came that she was ill, and she had apparently persuaded the Count

that Byron would help her to get better. The suggestion was taken, and on arriving at Ravenna Byron found her "very seriously in bed, with a cough and spitting of blood." Jeaffreson, who is malicious about Teresa, suggests that this was a ruse, which is a pleasing example of the ingenuities of which malice is capable. They feared that she was going into a decline, and Byron was installed as nurse. "During my illness, he was for ever near me, paying me the most amiable attentions, and, when I became convalescent, he was constantly at my side." On her recovery he remained, an accepted lover, though there seems to have been the pretence customary in the *serventé* code that the husband knew nothing about it. In July Byron was still "absorbed about La Gui. and her illness," in August she was much better, and in the same month he moved with the establishment to Bologna. The attachment for this "sort of Italian Caroline Lamb, except that she is much prettier, and not so savage," was taking serious hold of him. Before October the count had gone off on his own business, leaving Byron and Teresa to retire together for a time to the villa at La Mira.

And yet all was not well. "I have been faithful to my honest liaison with Countess Guiccioli," he could write in October; but, with the cessation of turmoil came reaction, and during these months Byron, happy enough with his new lover, fell into unwonted low spirits. His genuine anxiety for Teresa's health no doubt weakened his resistance, but in any case despondency seized him for a time. "At thirty I feel there is no more to look forward to." And again, "she has been ill, and I have been ill, and we are all languid and pathetic this morning." Whatever happens, this is his last love; but, even so, what, again, did it all amount to? At best this was but a hole-and-corner business, and, although their irregular position was recognised, it was still recognised as an irregularity, which was bothersome. It is pleasant to be convinced, as we are, that his sensitiveness in this matter was even more for Teresa than for himself; he really wanted to make the ordinary routine of life comfortable for her, and as things were it was difficult. To leave or to be left, he told Hobhouse, would drive him out of his senses, "and yet to what have

I conducted myself?" The world, he was proving, had an infernally cunning way of taking it out of the rebels.

In October Moore visited Byron at La Mira. That is to say, he stayed in Venice at the Mocenigo Palace, and Byron visited him each day to dine, not being able to absent himself more than that from Teresa. The meeting between the friends was cordial. Moore found Byron fatter, but still extremely handsome, while Byron found Moore "quite fresh and poetical," looking younger than himself, though nine years his senior. "Moore and I did nothing but laugh," Murray was told, but, La Guiccioli having allowed Byron a night off, he was able to amplify the information to Hobhouse with "Moore has been here; we got tipsy together, and were very amicable." Moore stayed four days, and left with the manuscript of Byron's memoirs, which were to cause so much heart-searching thereafter.

In November there was a crisis in the Guiccioli household. The count, having decided that he did not quite know where he was, presented an ultimatum to his wife, one of the conditions of which was Byron's exclusion from the domestic circle. As the count was evidently determined on making a serious business of it, Byron, with some difficulty and unaffected regret, persuaded Teresa that the only practicable thing was to acquiesce. She accordingly left La Mira for Ravenna with her husband, and the lovers were desolate. Byron, at least, was at his wits' end with distraction, and had no notion what to do with himself. He told Teresa that the only possible thing for him was to leave Italy, which threw her into agonies of protest. He took a fever himself. Then he thought he would settle in South America, taking Allegra with him, and bade his friends in England report on the prospects of such a venture; then he thought he would go to England to make the enquiries himself. But how to go to England? What for? The most famous poet in Europe, struggling desperately to find a footing on the quicksands under him, had to write to a friend in his own country, "I shall bring my little daughter Allegra with me, but I know not where to go. I have nobody to receive me, but my sister." And even his sister, if he had but known it, was being terrorised at the possibility of having

to receive him. But he was feverishly resolved on going, and in December was on the point of starting, with his luggage in the gondola says one account, when Allegra showed signs of sickness, and this, together with his reluctance to leave Teresa, turned him back. He wrote to the Guiccioli that love had after all gained the victory, and that he was at her commands. Would, perhaps, the South American project not be the best solution of their joint difficulties? But she was not for wild-cat schemes like this. Encouraged by what she reasonably took to be this fresh proof of Byron's devotion, she determined on drastic measures. She took steps to have her case laid before the Pope, with the result that, under official sanction, an arrangement was come to whereby the count made a graceful exit from the action, and she, under her father's protection, was free to acknowledge Byron's suit without public embarrassment. For all practical purposes they became permanently pledged to each other. Byron was a little startled, but agreeably so. At least he was off the quicksands; or so he devotedly believed. Negotiations, papal and otherwise, were not concluded until the middle of 1820; but by the beginning of the year he was back at Ravenna, and there was no more talk of England or South America.

Venice, that had once been the city of all cities in the world for him, had become the Sea-Sodom, and he cleared up his accounts with it. Literally cleared them up; for, suspecting that a clerk whom he had left in charge of his affairs was cheating him, he suddenly displayed a minute knowledge of his finances greatly at variance with his common reputation for practical inefficiency. He had, in fact, become rather attractively mercenary, driving proper bargains with Murray, pushing Hanson into action, watching his investments with disconcerting precision, "loving six-per-cent," and generally reminding people that, after all, his own was his. Critics have affected to detect in this a further sign of his deterioration, and more than one person, as we shall see, came to the self-flattering conclusion that Byron had fallen into discreditable meanness. The truth is that throughout his life to the end he gave with almost reckless generosity, and his critics have either been those who, having received much from him, wanted

more, or those who were fixed on ascribing whatever he did to venal motives. That somewhat late in his career he realised that money was worth looking after, even if it was only to be given away, seems to be a strangely frivolous occasion for complaint. In this connection Dallas makes a belated last entry into our story. In March 1820 Byron had to tell Murray that, having allowed Dallas first and last to pocket some fourteen hundred pounds of his royalties, "this person" has now written "a scrubby letter accusing me of treating him ill . . . I look upon his epistle as the consequence of my not sending him another hundred pounds, which he wrote to me for about two years ago, and which I thought proper to withhold, he having had his share, methought, of what I could dispose upon others." Hobhouse, in the article that he contributed to *The Westminster Review* attacking Dallas and Medwin, tells us that Byron had endorsed Dallas's letter thus: "The upshot of this letter appears to be, to obtain my sanction to the publication of a volume about Mr. Dallas and myself, which I shall not allow. The letter has remained, and will remain, unanswered. I never injured Mr. Dallas, and did him all the good I could, and I am quite unconscious and ignorant of what he means by reproaching me with ungenerous treatment, the facts will speak for themselves to those who know them—the proof is easy."

In spite of the Guiccioli's stabilising influence, Byron's remaining life in Italy pursued its episodic course. His poetry continued in an unbroken line of development, but in other respects he was governed, though less feverishly than before, by the instant. England was no longer an active memory for him; it was, perhaps, at moments a secret hope. What had passed there was forgotten save as practical necessities recalled it, or as a friend on his travels renewed it over the evening gin. If somehow he could really overhaul his life and close a hundred doors, then, who knew but—and the speculation would drift away as some voice or another brought him back to this odd vagabond existence into which he had drifted. And yet, not so wretched an existence by any means, after all. He would show them, when the chance came. His mind was preparing for what turned out to

be Greece; but more episodes had to be encountered before that happened.

4

Byron lived with the Guiccioli at Ravenna, at times under some supervision, until the end of October 1821. The incidents of the intervening months need not be followed chronologically for our purpose, but may conveniently be grouped in their more important aspects, some of which project into a date beyond the removal from Ravenna. Several references have been made to Allegra, and through her Byron was from her birth in more or less direct contact with Clare Clairmont and the Shelleys. The circumstances were these. When Shelley left Byron in Switzerland in the summer of 1816, he returned to England, and thence wrote a series of letters to his new friend, philosophising with him, and admonishing him in his charming patriarchal way, and keeping him informed of Clare's condition. In January both he and Mary wrote to tell Byron of Allegra's birth, and in April Shelley reported that both mother and child were well, and asked what Byron's plans were for his daughter. Byron, it need hardly be said, had no plans, and yet something must be done. The Godwin-Shelley-Clare views about marriage made it no easier for Clare to go about with a daughter to whom no father was allotted. At present Allegra was living with her mother at the Shelleys' house in Marlow, passing as the child of a friend in London, but that also would mean complications before long. Already there were warnings that, if Shelley were not careful, people would be kind enough to suggest that he himself was the father, and as he had sufficient scandal of his own on his hands, would it not be best if Byron came back to England and dealt with the situation? Byron did not think it would be best; nothing, indeed, could be less suitable. For one thing, it would mean a resumption of his relations with Clare, and that he was above all determined to avoid. In May he told Augusta that he did not know what to do about it, but that he might send for the child and have her educated in a Venetian convent; there was, in any case, no pros-

pect of affection from his legitimate issue, and as "I must love something in my old age, probably the circumstances will render this poor little creature a great and, perhaps, my only comfort." In July Shelley again asked what Byron had decided, and again Byron had decided nothing. Allegra was doing very well, but explanations to servants and curious visitors were becoming exceedingly difficult. Would Byron like him to place her with two very respectable young ladies in Marlow, who were willing to undertake the charge? Byron sent a reply to this question, but the letter appears to have been lost; in September Shelley told him that since hearing from him his plans had been so uncertain that he had taken no steps about Allegra, but that his own health would probably necessitate his wintering in Italy, in which case he should bring the child out with him. In December he found that he could not leave England, but was there not some one among Byron's powerful friends by whom Allegra could be taken to him—that is, if he so wished; otherwise, Shelley would see what could be done about securing a responsible guardian in England.

Byron here does not seem to be behaving too well, but three things have to be taken into consideration. In the first place, we do not know how many letters he may have written to Shelley at the time, nor what they contained. Secondly, the problem was really a perplexing one, and as Allegra was at present only an infant a few months old, its solution may reasonably not have seemed to be immediately urgent. Thirdly, there was Clare. Shelley on one occasion says that he supposes she will write to Byron herself, but there is no trace of any correspondence between them on the matter. And there is no doubt that Byron was convinced that any renewal of intimacy with Clare could lead to no kind of good, and, further, that if she were given the slightest opening, such renewal would be forced upon him. In both these convictions he was almost certainly right. That was the position in general terms, and it is important to note, on the evidence of the letter to Augusta and of later events, that it plainly does not involve Byron in a disinclination either to acknowledge his child or to accept responsibility for her maintenance.

In April 1818 Shelley, as we have seen, had arrived at Milan, Mary, Clare, and Allegra with him. He invited Byron to pay them a visit, suggesting that he might then take Allegra back with him if he thought proper to do so. As this proposal meant seeing Clare again, Byron would have nothing to do with it. Instead, he seems to have said that he was prepared to receive the child himself at Venice, but again the correspondence is lost. All we know is that Clare wrote in her journal on April 21st, "Letter from Albé" [Byron].[1] "Nothing but discomfort," that on the 22nd Shelley informed Byron that Clare was writing to him herself, and that on the same day she noted in her journal, "Write to Albé." But it is clear from Shelley's letter that Byron's willingness to look after the child in Venice was contingent on Clare renouncing all her claims, even to seeing her daughter. In this Byron has commonly been accused of being cruel, which Shelley told him plainly he thought he was. But the circumstance has to be related to the interview that took place between Shelley and Byron at Venice in the coming August, when Byron said, according to Shelley's report to Mary, "After all, I have no right over the child. If Clare likes to take it, let her take it. I do not say what most people would in that situation, that I will refuse to provide for it, or abandon it, if she does this; but she must surely be aware herself how very imprudent such a measure would be." Was, then, Byron's attitude so indefensible after all? It does not appear so. If Allegra was to live with him and Clare was to have even some sort of visiting status as an aunt, which was the suggestion, it would clearly end in the relations at close quarters against which he was fixedly resolved. Even if the child were only to be sent to Clare at intervals, this also would mean more or less direct communication, so why risk it? For himself, he was very uncertain as to whether he wanted the child or not; there was much to be said for it, on the lines of the letter to Augusta; but then there was obviously a great deal to be said against it. But if Clare was insistent that it was to Allegra's advantage to be with her father, then he had a right to make conditions; to pro-

[1] This refers to a letter written to Shelley, not to herself, one of which Shelley speaks as having been seen by her without his intention.

tect himself, as he saw it, from attentions that he could not endure. It is not as though Byron were exercising a legal right without giving Clare any option. He had no such right, and he gave her the widest option. If she did not like his terms, she could keep the child altogether, and he would make a proper financial allowance. This surely was reasonable, in the circumstances: which were that Byron was not to be induced to renew his affair with Clare, which was what Clare wanted. We may regret that this was so; we may think how pleasant it would have been if Bryon could have received his daughter and her mother with an affectionate welcome. But Byron just could not do that, and he had the good sense not to temporise about it. Up to this point he was dealing with the Clare-Allegra difficulty in the only clear-sighted and effective way. Byron was often enough at the mercy of his passions, but at least he did not lose himself in emotional mists.

Clare was persuaded, or persuaded herself, to let Allegra go. Early in August 1818 Byron wrote to Augusta that his little girl had been with him three months, was intelligent, pretty, and a great favourite with everybody, with blue eyes and "a devil of a spirit." With Allegra the Shelleys had sent a Swiss nurse, Elise, who was none too competent, and who was, moreover, under the disadvantage of not being able to speak the same language as any of Byron's servants. Tactically, Byron had made the mistake of not realising what a disconcerting addition Allegra might be to his household, and after a short time he was glad to accept Mrs. Hoppner's offer to take the child into her own family. But this was not in the bond; Clare had sent her daughter to Byron, not to some of Byron's friends, strangers to herself. Byron's tactics were at fault again, and Clare was far too quick-witted not to take her advantage. She was, admittedly, in a miserable position. To lose her child in this way was a heart-breaking business, and yet it has never been quite clear why, in view of her acute maternal distress, she gave Allegra away at all. To have kept her might have been inconvenient, but, it would seem, no worse than that. The suggestion that her sacrifice was due to a feeling that she ought not to deprive the child of the chance of growing up under the

tutelage of one of the great intellects of the age hardly convinces us. With every wish to be fair to a woman who, as we have shown, had considerable attractions, we cannot resist a suspicion that she really sent Allegra to Byron in the belief that sooner or later this would open the way to Byron for herself. It would be ungenerous to blame her for this, but it is no less so to blame Byron for seeing what the game was.

Shelley did not see it. A match between wits such as Clare's and Byron's was, very honourably, outside his philosophic scheme. People ought not to act from such motives, and therefore they did not, unless they were the ideal tyrants of poetry. The inspired-idiot view of Shelley is itself idiotic. Essentially he was a master of life, because he was a master of practical logic, in the profoundest sense a seer; but in affairs he was always prone to think people either better or worse than they were. At the moment he thought Clare was a good woman who was being abused by a man who, temporarily at any rate, was off his moral balance. And so when news of the Hoppner development arrived, and Clare thought she ought to go and see Byron about it, Shelley at once decided to go with her and see him about it too. Which was as well, if there was to be any interview at all, since on arrival at Venice they learnt from Hoppner that Byron had announced that if Clare came into his sight, he should immediately quit the town. Her presence was therefore concealed, and Shelley saw Byron alone. The result was so far satisfactory that, in offering the Shelleys the use of his house at Este, Byron was willing that Clare should be with them there and receive a visit from Allegra. This plan was carried out. Until the end of October Shelley and Mary with their child and Clare with hers stayed at the villa among the Euganean hills, Shelley writing *Julian and Maddalo* and part of *Prometheus Unbound*, Mary making fair copies of *Mazeppa* and other poems for Byron, Clare wondering what the next move was to be. Apparently no next move, however, was contemplated With the approach of winter the Shelleys were bound for Southern Italy, and there seemed to be nothing for her but to go with them. The bargain about Allegra had been made, and the week at Este had only been a concession, so that, as

the rest of the party moved south, she was sent back to her father at Venice. And by this time Clare must have been persuaded that her schemes, if schemes they were, would come to nothing.

When Byron set off after the Guiccioli in the late spring of 1819, Allegra was left with the Hoppners. By the end of the year she was living with her father, the Countess apparently having taken a fancy to her, and Moore mentions having seen her when he visited La Mira. Early in 1820 she was taken to Ravenna, Byron thanking Mrs. Hoppner for a parting gift of "a whole treasure of toys"; and in February Byron tells Murray "my daughter Allegra is just gone with the Countess G. in Count G.'s coach to join the Cavalcade." She was now three years old, "prettier, I think, but obstinate as a mule, and as ravenous as a vulture; health good, to judge of the complexion—temper tolerable, but for vanity and pertinacity. She thinks herself handsome, and will do as she pleases."

Clare's journal during this period informs us of correspondence passing between herself and Byron—he writing always through Shelley—but again we have to guess the nature of its contents. The following entries, all of them dated at Pisa, may be noted:

"*Tuesday*, *May* 18*th*, 1819.—Write a letter to Albé."

"*Sunday*, *Feb.* 20*th*, 1820.—Write to Albé and Madame Hoppner."

"*Sunday*, *April* 23*rd*, 1820.—Write to Albé."

"*Wednesday*, *May* 3*rd*, 1820.—A letter from Albé."

"*Thursday*, *May* 4*th*, 1820.—Write to Albé."

"*Friday*, *May* 19*th*, 1820.—Brutal letter from Albé."

The last entry is explained by a letter from Shelley to Byron, written from Pisa on May 26th, when he wishes that Byron had expressed himself less harshly about Clare, as she insists on seeing his letters. But Shelley's tone otherwise has undergone a complete change. He no longer questions Byron's conduct about Allegra, in fact he is sure that it is prudent. He and Mary still wish to help in any way they can, but he sees, and even Clare sees, the objections to Allegra coming to stay with them. As to Byron's resolution not to let Clare go to him and Allegra, which was no doubt the "brutality" of Clare's journal, Shelley says,

"I do not say that—I do not think—that your resolutions are unwise; only express them mildly—and pray don't *quote me*."

A month before Byron had written to Hoppner, with reference to the proposal that Allegra should go to Clare and the Shelleys at Pisa. "The child shall not quit me again to perish of Starvation, and green fruit, or be taught to believe that there is no Deity. Wherever there is convenience of vicinity and access, her mother can always have her with her; otherwise no. It was so stipulated from the beginning." Shelley had heard of these objections, and in his letter of May answers them with courteous humour; but he approves Byron's decision, as we have seen. A year later, in April 1821, this approval was emphasised, Shelley assuring Byron that both he and Mary considered that his conduct towards Allegra had been irreproachable, and that his plan for placing her in a convent was, in the circumstances, an entirely proper one. But here Clare had a very good point to make. The stipulation of which Byron spoke had been that the child should remain with one or the other of its parents; it had not provided for Hoppners, still less for convents. Clare wrote to Byron and put the case against his proposal with force and good sense, suggesting an English boarding-school as an alternative. Byron, however, overruled the objections to his scheme, as to the suitability of which we know that he had satisfied himself by careful enquiry, and Allegra was duly installed at the Convent of St. Anna at Bagnacavallo, a few miles away from Ravenna. There Shelley went to see her, taking with him a gold chain and a basket of sweetmeats. He was, as he would be, shocked by the discipline and doctrine of the place, and he had his own views about the diet, to which he attributed a fragility that he noticed in Allegra; but he found her full of vivacity, friendly with her companions and the nuns, and apparently treated with neither neglect nor harshness.

The rest of the unhappy story needs but few words. Clare's hopes about Byron personally no longer survived, and the separation from Allegra became a sufficient distress in itself. Byron once seems to have been on the point of sending the child back to Clare altogether for the sake of peace, but was restrained by

what was a genuine conviction that this would be the worst possible thing for Allegra herself. But the concession had to be either this or nothing, and so it was nothing. In August 1821 Clare notes "Very unexpected news of Albé—near arrival." Byron was leaving Ravenna for Pisa, and proposed, it seems, to take Allegra with him. On October 3rd is another entry: "Letter from Shelley that Allegra is not coming." The Guiccioli establishment was in considerable disorder for political reasons, as we shall see, and Byron decided, sensibly it must seem, to leave his daughter in the convent, for a time at any rate. In November Clare secretly sent an emissary to Bagnacavallo to see what the conditions of the place were. The report was not favourable, but then that, so long as it was not too bad, was the last thing that Clare wished it to be; what she wanted was not reassurance, but ballast for her argument. Professor Dowden says that she thereupon wrote again to Byron begging him to have Allegra removed, but asking for no consideration for herself. The letter is not produced. This reference to it, it is important to observe, is the only indication that Clare or any one represented to Byron the danger of allowing Allegra to remain at the convent, and as the document is not forthcoming it cannot be allowed that the representation was made at all. Mary Shelley, after Allegra's death, spoke to a friend of "many and often-urged prophecies of Clare that the air of Romagna,[1] joined to the ignorance of the Italians, would prove fatal to Allegra," but that is all we hear of them. One letter from Clare to Byron, written in February 1822, we are given, and melancholy reading it makes. There is no mistaking the poignancy of her appeal, but it is an appeal framed precisely in terms to which Byron had given his answer a dozen times already. A few weeks later Shelley came down with a strong hand on some design "of thoughtless violence" in which she asked him to co-operate for getting the child into her possession. In April Allegra caught a fever. Byron seems to have heard nothing of it until he received a message that the danger was over: this was quickly followed by another that his

[1] Which Mary, by the way, had herself assured Clare was the best in Italy.

daughter had died on the 20th. It was a bad business for Clare. She asked for a portrait and a lock of hair, which Byron sent. The evidence is clear that his own grief was no less severe. The child's body was, with Clare's consent, borne to England for burial, which took place in Harrow churchyard, the permission that Byron asked to place a tablet in the church being refused.

Thenceforth Clare's mind for fifty-five years nursed its embittered grievance against Byron. In measuring her justification for this we have to consider her character and his, and the facts of the story as a whole from the date of the first ill-omened letter from "E. Trefusis" in 1815 or 1816. On humane grounds Clare often claims our sympathy; but in dealing with a definite problem it is difficult to see how Byron could have acted otherwise than he did without making bad a good deal worse. We may question his judgment about Bagnacavallo, and we may wish that he could have found a way to greater lenience in enforcing his conditions. But to give a little was to run a grave risk of having a great deal taken, with, as he saw them, disastrous results. "I can refer to my whole conduct as having neither spared care, kindness, nor expense since the child was sent to me," he told Hoppner, and the profession has the stamp of truth. The view held by the Shelleys until a late stage in the story we have seen in its development. Their attitude as the dismal conclusion approached is rather obscure. Their position was a delicate one. They had a great anxiety to help Clare, who, in spite of discords with Mary, was their most intimate friend, and Shelley at least had a real regard for Byron, whom incidentally they believed on the whole to be in the right. But about Bagnacavallo they seem to have said one thing to Clare and another to him, an expedient to which they may very well have been driven without being much to blame. We have, probably, most of us at some time been in the same sort of predicament. Their position in the matter will become a little clearer in the following account of Byron's relations with Shelley considered apart from Clare's influence.

5

When the two poets first met in 1816, Byron was one of the most celebrated figures in Europe, known everywhere as the author of poems that had challenged Walter Scott's popularity, and Shelley was a writer of an almost imperceptible reputation. As he himself said, the only public attention bestowed on him was when a few readers wondered who this infamous Mr. Shelley might be who was so hotly attacked in the reviews. It says much for both men that they were from the first wholly unprejudiced in their opinions of each other by these false values. Shelley thought that Byron's was the most abundant poetic energy of his time; which, whatever his achievement may have been, it was. Byron was frequently a superficial and slipshod critic, but he was alone among contemporaries of anything like his own distinction in recognising at once that Shelley was the real thing. Shelley often thought Byron wicked, and Byron often thought Shelley mad, but each measured the other at his proper poetic stature, and each knew that stature to denote an essential greatness of spirit that was profoundly to be respected. In nothing does the magnanimity of either show to greater advantage than in the deeply founded good-will in which for so long they lived as friends with codes of conduct and philosophy in many respects so wholly irreconcilable. When Shelley was not distracted by some immediate crisis, he could see right into and through Byron's character and genius with amazing comprehension; but then there was little that Shelley could not so see when he gave his mind to it. On the whole, there is no testimony that stands more steadily in Byron's favour than that Shelley thought him a great poet and a great, if tormented soul. "The poetry of this piece is indeed sublime," wrote Shelley of one of his poems.[1] The eulogy might be given at greater length, but it may be counted as enough for any English poet to have been told by Shelley that anything he wrote was sublime. And again, in 1822: "What think you of Lord Byron's last volume? In my opinion it contains finer poetry than has appeared in England since the publication of

[1] *The Prophecy of Dante.*

Paradise Regained." Of Shelley's personal regard for Byron, nothing can be more eloquent to those who know the punctilious pride of that ethereal being than to say that on the day before his death he borrowed fifty pounds from the poet of *Don Juan*. Cynicism may make the most of this, and cynicism will be characteristically wrong. And Lord Ernle quotes a perfect example of Shelley's more intricate sense of Byron's poetic nature: "He touched a chord to which a million hearts responded, and the coarse music which he produced to please them, disciplined him to the perfection to which he now approaches." The intuition of that might discourage us from any more laboured estimate of Byron's endowment; but we may console ourselves by the reflection that it is only after such an estimate that we are able fully to perceive how marvellous the intuition is. Byron's own sense of Shelley's merit was no less decisive, though more casual: "You know my high opinion of your own poetry—because it is of *no* school." And Byron's rebuke of Murray after Shelley's death was in its mannered way a lovely tribute to the virtue of two spirits: "You are all mistaken about Shelley. You do not know how mild, how tolerant, how good he was in Society; and as perfect a Gentleman as ever crossed a drawing-room, when he liked, and where he liked." And again: "He alone, in this age of humbug, dares stem the current."

But within this instinctive understanding there were frequent and sometimes serious dissensions. Seen unsympathetically, Shelley was a moral pedant, Byron a profligate, and conflict on those definitions was inevitable. And as both men were given to plain speaking, they each in moments of provocation said things that need to be interpreted with some liberality. Incensed by Byron's inflexibility about the convent, Shelley exclaimed that he must positively disally himself from a being so insensible to the claims of humanity. He told Leigh Hunt, in the same connection, that familiar relations with Byron had become intolerable. But Shelley, far from being Arnold's angel of ineffectual wings, was a poet of intense response to immediate realities, and his protests meant no more than that in a present crisis Byron was proving excessively troublesome. Nevertheless, Shelley's strictures

were overheated, and in this respect Byron would have a commanding advantage in the records between the two, were it not for one notorious incident in which Clare Clairmont is again involved.

In August 1821 Shelley went to see Byron in Ravenna. He was then shown a letter that Hoppner had written to Byron nearly a year before, presenting charges of a sensational nature. Elise, the nurse who had for a time been in charge of Allegra, but had rejoined the Shelleys when they left for the south, had married a manservant in their employ, who, being proved to be a blackmailer, was dismissed. She had, according to Hoppner, given a lurid account of a child having been born by Clare to Shelley. This event was said to have taken place without Mary's knowledge, and the child, Elise declared, was surreptitiously placed in a local foundling hospital. The credibility of the charge is so negligible as not to warrant discussion, but Byron's conduct in the affair needs explanation on two counts. In the first place, he wrote to Hoppner at the time impugning Elise's reliability, but accepting the story as being "just like them"—that is, just like Shelley and Clare, though he had already asserted, when Hoppner seemed to be making insinuations, that Shelley "had talent and honour," but was "crazy against religion and morality." The plain fact is that Byron, on evidence that did not seem to need cross-examination, took the scandal for granted, but did not see that it was anything to make a particular fuss about. Again we are reminded that if we are to approach Byron at all, we must approach him by his own standards. If he had had a child by Clare, why should it be a matter for public consternation if Shelley had had one too? But Shelley himself did not take this desultory view of the case; he was, as Byron no doubt thought, unaccountably upset by a mercenary libel, and wrote in the full tide of his emotion to Mary, telling her all about it. Mary showed herself to be gallantly worthy of his confidence, and wrote a letter to Mrs. Hoppner putting Elise out of court as a witness and establishing her own absolute faith in Shelley. This letter was sent to her husband to forward, so that he and Byron might see it. Byron, who had

in some sense broken faith with Hoppner in speaking to Shelley on the matter at all, reasonably asked that he should be allowed to deliver this letter with a covering note that should explain his own position. Shelley accordingly entrusted him with this mission. But on Byron's death the letter was discovered among his papers, and Shelley's biographers have taken this as proof of Byron's perfidy. And perfidy it would inexcusably be if the facts were established. Either to please his vanity in not revoking his note to Hoppner, or in order to withhold evidence that might tell in Clare's favour, Byron, we are asked to believe, was guilty of as gross a breach of trust as could well be imputed to any man. And we do not believe it. Byron, with all his faults, was not built that way, and, beyond that, what could conceivably have been his motive? It is fantastic to suppose that he was afraid of the Hoppners; one of the consequences of his quarrel with the world very patently is that he was afraid of nobody. Mr. Edgcumbe's theory, endorsed by Lord Ernle, is the sound one. Mary's letter was forwarded to Shelley so that he and Byron might read it. It was, therefore, not sealed. When it had been so read, it was sealed by Shelley, as it was found on Byron's death. But the seal had been broken. Logically, it could have been broken by nobody but Mrs. Hoppner, to whom Byron duly forwarded the letter. But as this letter closely concerned his own affairs with Clare and Allegra, he asked for its return. The explanation can only be refused by wanton prejudice.

6

The political state of Italy in 1821 cannot, and need not, be discussed here. But it affected the Gamba family, and with them Byron. The Guiccioli's father and brother were suspect. Byron was threatened with inquisition, and Teresa with incarceration in a nunnery. There was brawling, and even bloodshed, at Byron's door. He was full of fight, but he did not want to lose the woman who was keeping his life in gear as no other woman had done. On the principle that to stampede dangerous members of the community from one place to another is to pre-

serve order, the authorities were intent for the moment only on getting the suspects out of Ravenna. And so, towards the end of 1821, Byron moved with his mistress and her relations to Pisa. Before relating what happened there, we must return for a moment to his poetry.

Between the beginning of his liaison with the Guiccioli and their departure for Pisa towards the end of 1821, Byron wrote:

Don Juan, Cantos III, IV, and V,
The Prophecy of Dante,
The Morgante Maggiore,
Marino Faliero,
The Vision of Judgment,
The Blues,
Sardanapalus,
The Two Foscari,
Cain,
Heaven and Earth, and a few short pieces.

Thus, in a further period of two years and a half he produced some eighteen thousand lines, hardly any of which show a relaxed energy. A good deal of this work may not be in high favour, but it cannot be dismissed as trifling, while a good deal of it is Byron at his best. The creative pressure and the actual labour of writing represented in this astonishing record needs no comment. Nor is it necessary for our purpose to add much to what has already been said about the characteristics of Byron's poetry in general; a few words only on the compositions individually are called for. Something will be said of *Don Juan* as a whole. *The Prophecy of Dante* Byron once called the best thing he ever wrote, "if it be not unintelligible." Jeffrey thought it unquestionably "the work of a man of great genius," but unintelligible he feared it would generally be. Shelley's praise has been quoted, and the poem has a good deal in it to recommend Byron's own opinion. But we do find it difficult to follow, and the *terza rima* in which it is written becomes tiresome long before the end of its

six hundred lines. Byron manages it well, but no one can manage it acceptably in English for so long. Otherwise the verse is often lovely, and almost entirely free from the lapses to which Byron was so easily given. This, indeed, is true of much of his work at this period; he was now writing in his most confident style. *The Prophecy* is, moreover, notable among his poetry for its intellectual toughness. This is not to suggest that Byron as a poet was commonly deficient in brains; he was, in the new vernacular, "crazy with brains," but, like many greatly gifted people, he did not always trouble to use them. With so fine a natural intelligence he found that he could entertain himself and an educated world of readers without thinking very hard, with the result that his poetry, far above the vulgar reckoning of precious criticism as it is, does not as a whole present a significant philosophic unity when it is measured by that of poets who were no richer in poetic energy than he. This may be but to say that he was a smaller poet than, for example, Milton and Wordsworth, perhaps than Shelley, but in saying it we recognise that because of his native energy it is by such standards that he claims to be measured. As a cumulative experience he means less than they; but in many pages, even through long poems, he gives us a delight that survives the test with ease. The views of such men as Shelley and Arnold do not ever really become obsolete. Towards the end of our study the opinion with which we set out is reinforced. Byron remains, if not one of the greatest of English poets, a poet of enduring interest who in his poetry was unquestionably a great writer.

The Morgante Maggiore was a line-for-line translation of an Italian poem; neither this nor the shorter pieces—among which was *The Irish Avator*, a resounding attack on what Byron took to be Irish pusillanimity—call for further mention here. *The Vision of Judgment*, perhaps the most famous of Byron's poems of middle length, was a satire provoked by Southey's obituary ode of the same name, with "A" instead of "The," written on the death of George III. This at least was Byron's occasion; but there was a more personal inspiration than was provided by

the very seductive imbecility of Southey's poem in itself. Southey had been in Switzerland after Byron's residence there in 1816, and was said to have taken home reports of Byron, the Shelleys, and Clare living together in a "league of incest." Byron observed that Southey was "a burning liar," which Southey afterwards explained that he was not, having been at no pains to discover anything about Byron's affairs and having carried no reports about them good or bad; obliquely, it was no business of Southey's to say whether the charges were true or not, since he neither had made them nor knew of them. Southey was as well aware as any one that they were false, but so astute a controversialist as he could hardly be expected to deny reports that had been brought to his notice for the first time by Byron himself. In the meantime, however, Byron had written a crushing dedication of the first cantos of *Don Juan* to the "two Bobs," Southey and Castlereagh. When through the timidity of Murray and Byron's friends it was decided to publish *Don Juan* anonymously and with a fictitious imprint, this dedication was suppressed; "I won't attack the dog in the dark." It was not published until 1833, but Southey had heard of it at the time of its composition, and he had been able to read in the body of *Don Juan* of himself "so quaint and mouthy." In his preface to *A Vision of Judgment* he spoke out, and scored with a pointed arraignment of "the Satanic School." This preface, like most of Southey's prose, is excellent, but the poem that follows it is perhaps the supreme example of inflated banality in English verse. It ought always to be read before the perusal of Byron's satire. Any interest that it might have as an experiment in hexameters is lost in a laureate servility that becomes profane, and Byron had no difficulty in covering the performance with ridicule. He heightened his effect by being just to George III, who was ostensibly the subject of his poem as he had been of Southey's. Acknowledging the private virtues of the dead king, he flouted the contention that he had been anything but a lamentable influence in English policy. He did this with passion and brilliant exposition, but the real weight of his attack was directed against Southey himself, who on beginning to read his poem to the angelic powers is knocked down by Peter

with his keys at the fifth line, and falls into the infernal lake, where

> He first sank to the bottom—like his works,
> But soon rose to the surface—like himself.

In sober perspective we see that the quarrel was a silly one; neither Byron nor Southey was half as bad as the other professed to think him, but it was Southey's ill-fortune that the profession on Byron's side found its way into an imperishable satire.

It will be noticed that in the above list are included six plays; *Manfred* belongs to 1816-17, an eighth, *Werner*, was written immediately after the removal to Pisa, and *The Deformed Transformed* in 1822; it is in place here to say something of Byron as a dramatic poet.

The Blues is a short satirical sketch, but the rest are full-length dramas, very solidly written. They have never had an important theatrical history, and to-day they are probably less read than any other part of Byron's work. But for two years at the height of his maturity he poured into them the full force of his genius and passion, and to go back to them is to find that in many respects they are uncommonly good after all. In writing them Byron expressly disclaimed any intention for the stage. This was but symptomatic of the general unhappy estrangement that lasted for nearly two hundred years between English literature and the English theatre. The origin and course of this quarrel are not now our business, but Byron leaves us in no doubt as to his own position. In his preface to *Marino Faliero* he says, "I have had no view to the stage; in its present state it is, perhaps, not a very exalted object of ambition; besides, I have been too much behind the scenes to have thought it so at any time. And I cannot conceive any man of irritable feeling putting himself at the mercies of an audience. The sneering reader, and the loud critic, and the tart review are scattered and distant calamities; but the trampling of an intelligent or of an ignorant audience on a production which, be it good or bad, has been a mental labour to the writer, is a palpable and immediate grievance, heightened by a man's

doubt of their competency to judge, and his certainty of his own imprudence in electing them his judges. Were I capable of writing a play which could be deemed stage-worthy, success would give me no pleasure, and failure great pain. It is for this reason that, even during the time of being one of the committee of one of the theatres, I never made the attempt, and never will." As to the justice of Byron's self-denying ordinance it is difficult to speak. No length of experience in reading plays can make us sure of the effect that they would have in performance. In Byron's own lifetime *Marino Faliero* was given for a few nights at Drury Lane, against his wishes and even in spite of a legal injunction. Macready played *Sardanapalus* some thirty times in 1834, and in 1838 he and Helen Faucit gave three or four performances of *The Two Foscari*. *Werner* was played in 1830 by Macready, and afterwards by Phelps. Irving produced this play for a benefit performance in 1887, with Miss Ellen Terry in the part of Josephine. *Manfred*, with Schumann's music, has been revived more recently, and there are records of other occasional productions. But Byron's plays have never been seriously identified with the English theatre, and we have to form our opinions from the printed page.

The plays fall into two groups. Byron called *Cain* "A Mystery." It is the presentation of an abstract idea, of a state of mind, with a very elaborate background of supernatural scenery. With its fluent lyricism and protracted philosophic dialogue, which was in Byron's time supposed to be speculatively daring, and even shocking, it is not essentially dramatic either in conception or execution. As a sustained lyric in dramatic form it has fine moments, and sometimes achieves rhetoric of a high order, as in Eve's curse upon Cain, but the scheme as a whole is one beyond the natural resources of Byron's mind. These cosmic tasks were little suited to his witty, positive, mobile genius, and his ritual of abstract revelation becomes not profound but laborious. Intellectual majesty was not his office, and in *Cain*, *Manfred*, and *Heaven and Earth*, splendid as they all are in passages, we feel as we do nowhere else in his work that his magnificent faculties were outranged. The spiritual instruction fails and

we are conscious of a child boldly declaiming an argument that it does not understand. A great deal has been made of the significance of the "mystery" [1] poems, but it is precisely in significance that they are lacking. The philosophical bent that Byron discovered in them seems to us to be by far the least important aspect of his work, and he is a poet who can very well afford to write off this one bad debt.

The Deformed Transformed is an incompleted scheme, with an unfinished action, governed again by a "mystery" motive. It adds nothing to Byron's account. Of the remaining plays, *Werner* is far less satisfactory in construction and a good deal more confused in purpose than the others, and may here be disregarded. But for *Marino Faliero*, *Sardanapalus*, and *The Two Foscari* we are disposed to enter a very much higher claim than is usually made. They have, first, the cardinal merit of being extremely interesting. In them Byron used historical stories, accepting, as he says, the poet's responsibility of presenting history in pregnant form to the people, as a duty in emulation of the Greeks. He took immense trouble to absorb everything that could be found relating to his subject. He then discards and manipulates at will for dramatic expediency, but he crowds his stage with vivid and convincing personages, and it is here, rather than in his narrative poems, that he displays his superb gift for presenting rapid and stimulating action. I believe that these plays, properly presented, would handsomely survive the test of the stage; of some scenes, such as those between the Doge and Israel (*Marino Faliero*, Act III, scene i) and between Sardanapalus and Myrrha (*Sardanapalus*, Act I, scene ii) there could be no doubt. It is true that in the dramas Byron falls into his old carelessness more readily than in the other work of this time. Weak and banal lines remind us too frequently of his facility in the art of sinking, nor does he spare us such horrors as "like what" and "than what." He further indulges the fault of metaphorical digression so dear to dramatic poets who are not disciplined to the stage, and he sometimes spoils an effect by a

[1] This is to apply the term, suitably I think, beyond Byron's original intention; he used it only in connection with *Cain*, and defined it as "a tragedy on a sacred subject."

mere lack of theatrical *savoir-faire*. But these plays, the three of them at least that seem to promise most in presentation, are vehement and full-bodied, holding us by an inspiration that may be irregular but is never precious or niggardly. If they do not often achieve the grand manner, they are consistently designed on a grand scale. Whatever the faults of their creator may have been, triviality was not one of them.

To this period also belong an unfinished prose romance, of which Byron sent a hundred pages in manuscript to Moore, a considerable note-book of "Detached Thoughts," containing a great variety of Byron's reflections on men and literature, and his pamphlet defending Pope against the strictures of W. L. Bowles. The last of these was written in a cause dear to Byron's heart. "As to Pope, I have always regarded him as the greatest name in our poetry. Depend upon it, the rest are barbarians." The controversy need not be examined here, but perverse as Byron often was about poetry, his appreciation of Pope's was well-informed and well-reasoned. His pamphlet, unproportioned though it is in detail, presents a general view of Pope to which the taste of our own time is returning. Bowles made his answer; Byron in the meantime, provoked by another pamphlet that Bowles had issued on the subject, had prepared a further reply, much more scathing than the first but, moved by the temperance of his opponent's answer to himself, he instructed Murray to suppress it; this was done at the time, but Byron's second *Letter to John Murray, Esq.*, was published in 1835. So far as Bowles is concerned the matter may rest here, but Byron's second letter contains an allusion that calls for further notice. In deriding the "Cockney School" of poets and charging them with disparagement of Pope, he refers to "a Mr. John Ketch, [who] has written some lines against him, of which it were better to be the subject than the author." In March 1820, in the course of a then unpublished reply to an attack upon himself in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Byron had denounced Keats as "a young person learning to write poetry, and beginning by teaching the art." Keats's immediate offence was the passage in *Sleep and Poetry* where Pope and his followers are addressed:

But ye were dead
To things ye knew not of,—were closely wed
To musty laws lived out with wretched rule
And compass vile: so that ye taught a school
Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit, etc. etc.

Professor de Selincourt justly maintains that Keats was here inspired not by conceit of himself but by an instinctive knowledge of what had been happening to English poetry since the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. But Byron not unnaturally was provoked by the lines, and he was entitled to defend his own preferences. So far he was not to blame, and to know his controversial manner is not to expect anything but biting candour. Unfortunately Byron did not in the present case stop at that, and between the "young person" of March 1820 and the "Mr. John Ketch" of March 1821 we find a series of observations upon Keats that on the whole form the most discreditable incident in Byron's literary career. We remember the many instances of his generosity to young authors, and his magnanimity about Moore, Scott, Coleridge, and half a dozen other successful contemporaries. We remember also that when he attacked Southey and Rogers and the rest, publicly or privately, he was roused by some explicit lapse in taste or loyalty, or what he believed to be such, and that his malice was redeemed by the passion of wit. But in speaking of Keats he merely lost his temper and his sense of decency. What it was that trapped him into this dismal exhibition it is impossible to say; happily it was his first and last offence of the kind. It was all right to be severe on this tyro's disrespect for Pope; it was not culpable, though insensitive, to miss the merits of Keats's own poetry, even after the publication of the wonderful 1820 volume. But severity on the one hand and indifference on the other cannot account for the tone of Byron's successive comments. He was given to spasms of opinion, but never did they betray him so miserably as now. My own experience is that at every step the better to know Byron is the better to like him. When the almost endless evidence about him has been sifted and the great volume of his work absorbed, he remains, it seems to me, a major poet, a character of astonish-

ing vigour, and a most engaging personality. But I have to confess that his treatment of Keats, if that can be called treatment which did not affect its object one way or the other, admits of no excuse. We have merely to record it, and then leave it as we should the fault of a friend. In October 1820 Byron wrote to Murray complaining that instead of the books he had asked for he had received "Johnny Keats's poetry," which he designated in terms not of contemptuous humour but of adolescent prurience, adding later in the letter, "There is such a trash of Keats and the like upon my tables, that I am ashamed to look at them." The trash was a volume containing *The Eve of St. Agnes*, the Odes *To a Nightingale*, *To a Grecian Urn*, and *To Autumn*, and *Hyperion, a Fragment*. "No more Keats, I entreat: flay him alive; if some of you don't, I must skin him myself: there is no bearing the drivelling idiotism of the Mankin." In November Byron returns to the subject: "The *Edinburgh* praises Jack Keats or Ketch, or whatever his names are," and again he drops into an obscene image, which he reinforces a few days later. And finally, in the same month, "Of the praises of that little dirty blackguard Keates in the *Edinburgh*, I shall observe . . . etc." Three months later Keats died, and Byron changed his tone, or he moderated it. At the end of April he wrote to Shelley, who attributed Keats's death (February 23rd) to the attacks of the reviewers. "I am very sorry," says Byron, "to hear what you say of Keats"—whose name he has suddenly learnt to spell. "Poor fellow! though with such inordinate self-love he would probably have not been very happy." He differs still and essentially from Shelley's estimate of his poetry, but, hating cruelty, would gladly have seen Keats anywhere he liked on Parnassus. We know now that his pity, not the more impressive for his recollection at that moment of his own early defiance of the *Edinburgh*, was wasted on Keats, who lacked no fortitude. On the same day he made a similar qualification, such as it was, to Murray. Then, three months later, he decided that he ought to go further, and wrote again, somewhat confusedly, to Murray: "You know very well that I did not approve of Keats's poetry, or principles of poetry, or of his

abuse of Pope; but, as he is dead, omit *all* that is said *about him* in any MSS. of mine, or publication. His *Hyperion* is a fine monument, and will keep his name." Byron was, in fact, rather ashamed of himself, and when he added, "I do not envy the man who wrote the article," we may hope that he was feeling none too pleased with the man who had written other things. In August he repeated the instructions to suppress the offending passages, and by November he was admitting that his indignation at the depreciation of Pope had caused him to be unjust, that the fragment of *Hyperion* now reminded him of Æschylus, and that Keats was a "loss to our literature." All of which meant that he knew he had misconducted himself, and wanted to make belated amends. But he never really cared for Keats's poetry or attempted to understand it. As a boy Keats had for a moment fallen under Byron's spell, thereafter to become coldly critical. Shelley, with his sublime modesty, seeing the best in both, saw them both as greater poets than himself; but they were unaware of each other's splendour, unaware that their names would so strangely become inseparable, with Shelley's own, in English poetry.

The days at Ravenna that were drawing to an end had their diversions. Byron's connection, already mentioned, with the schemes for Italian liberation necessitated some vigilance. He received a threat of assassination, he was warned not to ride in secluded parts of the woods, and there is a story that one day he found a paper fixed up in the market-place setting a price on his head. Otherwise he wrote his poetry, visited the Guiccioli (who for a time had to live in a separate house), took his rides regularly, showed a spasmodic interest in English politics, and carried on his exuberant correspondence. He scolded Murray as usual, implored him in letter after letter to send out soda-water and tooth powder, cursed Drury Lane for putting his play on, affected to be a skinflint one moment and made handsome concessions the next. He suffered from intermittent touches of fever, upbraided Fletcher for a fool in turning money-lender at twenty percent., tried laudanum with no effect, and declared that Murray and Moore would both outlive him. He was, in

short, facing his life, a little less distracted than it had lately been, but as unsettled in aim as ever, in the old unshaken spirit. His time was crowded with work, but as it left his hands it seemed to leave his life; he no longer feared censure or resented it; he merely asked not to be bothered by it. He forbade Murray to send him any "Review, Magazine, Newspaper, English or foreign, of any description," or any opinions "either good, bad, or indifferent . . . concerning any work . . . of mine, past, present, or to come." His health, though good enough as it seemed, was always playing him little ominous tricks. He was mixed up in a national intrigue in which he could at best take a vicarious interest, and it might prove very discommoding at any moment. He was tied to an admirable woman, but after all he was tied, and there were disadvantages in that too, especially as no one seemed to know precisely what the tie was. But the zest, the raillery, the high spirits, never failed. If he suffered, and could lives be truly read few men perhaps would be found to have suffered more, he turned his suffering into the symbols of his poetry, and for the world he had but one thing, a good heart and be damned to them.

7

And now he had to leave Ravenna, which he had no inclination whatever to do, because of some meddling policeman or cardinal or whatever he was. The poor of the town, accustomed to his liberality, sent in a petition to authority that he should be requested to remain. But authority, although it knew its place so far as an English peer himself was concerned, associated him with the undesirable Gambas, and would only be too glad to see the last of him; so that he was not persuaded to stay. Accordingly in September 1821 we find Shelley informing him that the Lanfranchi Palace on the Lung' Arno at Pisa had been engaged for him at four hundred crowns (£90 or so) a year, and a few weeks later Byron moves in with a caravan of goods and his menagerie.

The Lanfranchi Palace, on the north bank of the Arno, stand-

ing to-day just as it was in Byron's time, looks out on one of the loveliest views of Europe. Built up to the superb sweep of the river on either side, the city absorbs the clear Italian light into the soft grey of its mediæval stone, glowing with a crisp opalescence. The river, arched by its series of noble bridges, is wide enough to set the opposing houses back in easy prospect, giving grace and proportion to the solid piles of masonry that have seen the passing of centuries. Even to-day modern commerce has made hardly a mark upon the shores; what we see, Byron saw, as Galileo must have seen it in the days when he would climb to the top of the leaning tower to drop his plummet-line and speculate upon the laws of gravitation. Byron's house, built, it is said, by Michael Angelo for a Lanfranchi descended from a family known to Dante, is not a palace by courtesy merely. It could accommodate his conglomerate household with ease, and still have room to spare, which proved later to be not so satisfactory. Once he had settled into it, Byron liked the place well enough, but Fletcher was troubled with ghosts and could not sleep at nights. He informed Byron that the ghosts were playing bowls, and succeeded in frightening his master as well as himself. Shelley assured them that it was natural for any Lanfranchi to be uneasy and walk the scene of a guilty life, and Fletcher would agree with Byron that Mr. Shelley had very poor ideas of pleasantry. The Shelleys had apartments in a house a few yards up the river on the other bank, and the Guiccioli, with her father, the Count Gamba, and her brother, Count Pietro Gamba, the watchful eyes of the police still on them, were installed for a time in a separate establishment, within easy calling distance of Byron.

While he was at Pisa, there was some renewal of activity in Byron's domestic affairs at home. Augusta continued to send him reports of his daughter, and he wrote to Lady Byron acknowledging the receipt of a lock of Ada's hair. But all ideas of a reconciliation had been abandoned; he had, he told Lady Byron, but two thoughts of her; that she was the mother of his child, and that they would never meet again. He asked only for some toleration of feeling. What hope such an appeal might

have had with Lady Byron we have seen; but the letter, although written, was never sent, Byron deciding that it could do no good. Through the early part of 1822, on the death of Lady Noel, as Lady Milbanke had become, he was in correspondence with Douglas Kinnaird about the settlement of the family estates, in connection with which he assumed the name of Noel. The negotiations were not personally soothing, and in June he wrote to Hanson: "I expect neither comfort nor honour nor fair dealing from Lady Byron nor any of her agents, never having met with it hitherto from any of them." Byron's moods about his wife were capricious to the last; she with regard to him was inflexible; and so the score rests between them. It was a hopeless connection from the moment of their engagement, and the marriage, after the first few months, was a disaster unredeemed by any ameliorating aspect either while they were together or when they had separated. As an incident in two lives it has to be recorded a total loss, and no further reference need be made to it.

From the time of his arrival in Pisa, Byron's life began to be more fully documented than ever. First there was Medwin. Escorted by Shelley, he called at the Lanfranchi Palace a few days after Byron's arrival. A bull-dog guarded the approach to Byron's apartments, but, pacified by Shelley, allowed the stranger to pass. In the anteroom Medwin found Fletcher in command of several servants in livery. This we learn from the opening of the *Conversations of Lord Byron*, one of the most justly abused and one of the best books in Byron literature. Something of Medwin's credentials has already been said; perhaps too much. But in this book there is scarcely a statement that can be trusted, and yet not one that does not contribute to a portrait of Byron that seen at a distance is strangely convincing. Against the views of Medwin that have been given may be set one stray word. Robert Montgomery, in an unpublished letter, in which he recommends a paper by Medwin on *The Agamemnon* to Charles Wentworth Dilke as editor of *The Athenæum*, adds, "Do not judge Medwin by the *Conversations*—they were a *three-weeks' child*—he is a fine enthusiast, an accomplished scholar," etc.

PLATE X

Artist unknown
1

Hayter
2

Bodleian Library Coll.
3

Wivell
4

Newton
5

Pickersgill
6

Phillips
7

1. CAPTAIN JOHN BYRON (The Poet's Father)
2. JAMES HENRY LEIGH HUNT
3. PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY
4. THE PRINCE REGENT (George IV)
5. JOHN CAM HOBHOUSE
6. JOHN MURRAY
7. THOMAS MOORE

Medwin's book, however, can no more be defended than it can be dismissed. It is, no doubt, largely invention, partly Medwin's and partly Byron's, but between them they managed to invent a figure that is sometimes nearer truth than is nature itself. The book makes no pretence to order; in a series of paragraphs loosely strung together from his notes, Medwin tells us indifferently that Byron used to place a napkin in his mouth to prevent himself from grinding his teeth in his sleep, what his marriage settlements were, that on the wedding anniversary in 1822 he gave a party when Lady Byron's health was drunk in bumpers, that Fletcher once said, "It is strange that every woman should be able to manage his Lordship but her Ladyship," that Byron thought himself a poor talker, also that he said, "Good prose resolves itself into blank verse," and many things as silly, that he supposed people would soon be travelling by air-vessels, with the very remarkable observation, "All our boasted inventions are but the shadows of what has been—the dim images of the past." Medwin purposely attempts no selection, and he is justified of his method, or lack of it. One passage may be given as a favourable example of the general effect produced:

> The history of one, is that of almost every day. It is impossible to conceive a more unvaried life than Lord Byron led at this period. I continued to visit him at the same hour daily. Billiards, conversation, or reading, filled up the intervals till it was time to take our evening drive, ride, and pistol practice. On our return, which was always in the same direction, we frequently met the Countess Guiccioli, with whom he stopped to converse a few minutes. He dined at half an hour after sunset, then drove to Count Gamba's, the Countess Guiccioli's father, passed several hours in her society, returned to his palace, and either read or wrote till two or three in the morning; occasionally drinking spirits diluted with water as a medicine. . . . Such was his life at Pisa.

Rogers and Hobhouse have also left accounts of visits paid to Byron at Pisa, the former in *Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers*, edited by Dyce in 1887, the latter in volume iii of *Recollections of a Long Life* (1910). Rogers, with "nose and

chin would shame a knocker," was now sixty, and something of an enigma to his friends. Liberal with his wealth and mild in his published opinions, he had a reputation for private venom that, justly or not, prompted the jest "the worst-natured man and the best-natured muse." Byron had heard that Rogers had been saying unpleasant things about him: as far back as the beginning of 1818 he had written, "If I once catch him at any of his jugglery with me or mine, let him look to it." At this time, too, he wrote a fierce little satire, and put it aside against eventualities; it was in fact not published until 1833. In September 1821 he said to Murray that he hoped Rogers, who was in Italy, would avoid Ravenna; "there is a mean minuteness in his mind and tittle-tattle that I dislike. . . . Why don't he go to bed? What does he do travelling?" When, however, Rogers turned up, Byron asked him to stay with him at Pisa as long as he liked, but the visit was only a partial success. Rogers informs us that they quarrelled every evening, Byron saying everything he could to mortify him, but made it up in the mornings. Byron was, in truth, not satisfied that his suspicions about his guest had been misplaced, and wavered between resentment and his duties as a host. To abet the former mood he enlisted the bulldog, teaching him to growl at Rogers, whose thin legs we can see twinkling along the Lanfranchi corridors in retreat. When Rogers had gone, Byron still toyed with the little satire; he had sent his only copy to Murray, and late in 1822 asked for its return. He thought he would like to look at it again.

Hobhouse, whose visit took place in September 1822, had lately been none too well pleased with Byron. He had been upset by the verses "My boy Hobbie O," he had been upset by the business of giving manuscript memoirs to that fellow Moore, he had been upset by *Cain* and *Don Juan*, and he had been upset by Byron's connection with Leigh Hunt, of which we shall hear shortly. Hobhouse was disinterestedly Byron's friend, but there was always just a suggestion in his attitude that he was the only person who knew what Byron really was. These last years Byron had broken away from him, he felt, had got a little out of hand. Why memoirs to Moore? Why not to Hobhouse?

And see what happened: he had drifted into a society that encouraged things like "My boy Hobbie O," which may have been meant to be funny, but was in exceedingly poor taste; worse still, it had inspired him to the production of *Cain* and *Don Juan*, which had become a public scandal. And then Leigh Hunt —altogether it was very unfortunate. And with Hobhouse launched upon a distinguished political career, it was plaguey difficult always having to stand up for a friend who insisted on misbehaving himself. The great thing about Hobhouse is that, in spite of everything, he did stand up for Byron from first to last. He was a little heavy about it sometimes, but he did it, and his reward is not a slight one in the history of literature. At the moment of his Pisa visit in 1822, however, he was inclined to be touchy. A few months before he had written a very severe letter to Byron about the memoirs, and had been told, with great civility, to mind his own business. It was obtuse of Byron not to see that this was Hobhouse's business, but there it was. Byron had, further, told Hobhouse that he was not going to allow this kind of misguided interference to make a quarrel between them, an assurance none the less humiliating for its good-will. And so he found Byron "much changed—his face fatter, and the expression of it injured." At first they were "both a little formal." But the two friends soon warmed to the old and genuine affection. There were drawbacks: the Leigh Hunt children, for example, and vexing intelligence, as that Byron had kept a journal at Ravenna, which was well enough, but, Hobhouse notes in his diary, "Began it to T. Moore." On the second day, however, "it seemed to us both that we had not been separated for more than a week. We talked over old times and present times in the same strain as usual." Hobhouse stayed six days, not at the Lanfranchi Palace, but spending most of his time and all his evenings there. He warned his friend about taking further risks with *Don Juan*, tried to persuade him that he was writing too much, and formed an impression that his liaison with the Guiccioli was becoming irksome. Before he left, however, he and Byron had talked out all their differences, and the words he carried away with him were, "Hobhouse, you should never have

come, or you should never go." They sprang from one of Byron's moments of startled realisation.

Hobhouse had also been uneasy about the Guiccioli affair. It was Italian morality, he knew, but after all—well, he was not inconsolable in suspecting that it was on the wane. Other critics have come to the same conclusion, and Byron's antecedents encourage the view. It is true, also, that he did leave Teresa, to go to Greece. But his decision to do this may, without undue idealism, be attributed to other and worthier motives than weariness of a love intrigue. The evidence that he was tired of the Guiccioli, to the point of wishing to break with her, is to seek. Hobhouse suggests it, Leigh Hunt asserts it, but the one witness is prejudiced and the other, in this connection, a liar. Beside Hobhouse's impression may be set that of another observer. Byron in 1822 found himself not only a European celebrity; while he was hearing that Goethe was proclaiming him in Germany and that his poems were being set there as test pieces for translation, he was also receiving flattering testimonials from America. Numerous editions of his works were being published in that country, and he was asked by the Academy of Fine Arts in New York to sit for his portrait to a young American artist, William Edward West, who was travelling in Italy at the time. This Byron consented to do, and West has left an attractive record of the sittings. The date was about midsummer 1822. West says not only that the Guiccioli was indisputably lovely, but that Byron "seemed very fond of her, and I was glad of her presence, for the playful manner which he assumed towards her made him a much better sitter." The evidence is telling. The next day Byron asked West to paint the Guiccioli herself, which he did, the two subjects sitting on alternate mornings. West adds, "He gave me the whole history of his connection with her, and said that he hoped it would last for ever; at any rate, it should not be his fault if it did not." Hobhouse speaks two months later, but cynicism must not be too confident of itself. Mr. West takes a good deal of discrediting.

In the early days of his residence in Pisa, Byron naturally saw much of Shelley. They could almost greet each other across

the Arno from their windows. Byron hated discussions, says the Guiccioli, "but he made an exception in favour of Shelley." She means that he hated Shelley's arguments, but was fond enough of Shelley himself to put up with them. She suspected that Shelley was trying to convert Byron to something or another, atheism she feared, but was satisfied that the charming madman was wasting his time. While Byron was proof against his friend's hallucinations, however, he liked his company, and Teresa seems to have encouraged him to enjoy it. Rogers told Moore that Byron treated Shelley "very cavalierly," but there is nothing whatever to account for this beyond Rogers's own malice. Shelley was, perhaps, the one associate whom Byron treated habitually with respect, and even with something of deference. Two indications of his regard may be added to those already given. While Shelley was still alive, Byron said to Medwin, "Every one abuses Shelley—his name is coupled with everything that is opprobious; but he is one of the most moral as well as amiable men I know. I have now been intimate with him for years, and every year has added to my regard for him." And after the tragedy of Via Reggio, Byron anticipated the judgment that we have already heard him delivering to Murray, with this to the same correspondent: "[Shelley] was, without exception, the *best* and least selfish man I ever knew. I never knew one who was not a beast in comparison."

8

But the friendship with Shelley, so soon to be terminated in horror, brought a confusion of peculiar subtlety in its train. When Shelley had visited Byron at Ravenna, they had discussed among other things the plight of Leigh Hunt. In one of the noblest letters that Byron ever wrote,[1] he says to Walter Scott, "I think that you, and Jeffrey, and Leigh Hunt, were the only literary men . . . who dared venture even an anonymous word in my favour just then," that is, at the time of his domestic

[1] Moore, vol. ii, p. 569. (Lord Ernle, vol. vi, p. 1.) If a single document had to be put in for the vindication of Byron's character, this would be no bad choice.

scandal. These were obligations that Byron always honoured, and when Shelley proposed that something should be done for Hunt, he could not have found a readier listener. Let Hunt come out to Italy, and the three poets together would found and conduct a journal that should redeem Hunt's fortunes, and incidentally give Byron a medium whereby to show that *Cains* and *Don Juans* were not to be attacked with impunity. Hot from persuasion, Shelley wrote off to London, and Hunt saw salvation in the letter. He also saw, when negotiations had advanced, two hundred and fifty pounds[1] of Byron's money—for which Shelley gave a bond—to pay his passage out to Italy. Not precisely his passage, since he embarked with Mrs. Hunt and their six children. Therein lies the secret of the ensuing trouble. Byron, as Mr. Harold Nicolson suggests in his beautifully poised manner, may have been stampeded by Shelley; the invitation was in any case highly honourable to both of them. But its acceptance by Leigh Hunt was folly. Had he gone out to Italy by himself to see how the land lay, he would have been acting within the bounds of a somewhat daring reason. But to take a wife, who was like himself seriously ailing, and six young children into a new world on the security of a journalistic speculation, and beyond that on the security of nothing but the indulgence of friends, was to act outside the bounds of any reason at all. However, he arrived in Italy, with his family and nothing but the residue of Byron's loan, and fell straight upon calamity.

At the end of April, Shelley had moved out of Pisa to Lerici for the summer months. A few weeks later Byron followed suit, encouraged, as we shall see, by the police, establishing himself with the Guiccioli at Montenero, near Leghorn. Late in June, Hunt arrived, and called on Byron. Rooms were put at his disposal in the Lanfranchi house, and Shelley came down from Lerici to bustle him away from the hotel at Leghorn, and took him with his wife and offspring to settle at Pisa. Byron and Teresa arrived on the same day. Whatever Byron had bargained

[1] See Byron's letter to Kinnaird, February 6th, 1822. Dowden says £200.

for, it was not this. Shelley was uncomfortable, but happy in his good works. Byron must not be unduly troubled, so Shelley took the Hunts off his hands and superintended their installation. He went out with them to choose furniture, and Byron paid for it. Then he tackled the grand question of the journal. It was decided to call it *The Liberal*, and Byron offered a free gift of *The Vision of Judgment* to the first number. Satisfied that this ensured success to the project, Shelley set off back for Lerici and Mary. And Byron found himself with a family of eight in what was for all he knew permanent possession of his ground floor. A pretty predicament, to be sure; but there was at least the hope that Shelley realised that it was more his business than Byron's, and that in case of emergencies he would turn up from Lerici to take control. For with all his metaphysics and atheism, Shelley had an unexpectedly sure hand when things were in a mess. But the sure hand was never to be raised again.

When Shelley left Pisa for Lerici, on July 7th, he first drove through the evening to Leghorn. The next morning, with his friend Williams, he prepared to sail in his little new boat, the *Ariel*. Having done some shopping, by two o'clock they were ready. But the weather was threatening; they were warned against starting; the warnings were disregarded, and the rest is a pitiless and inscrutable gesture of fate. For twenty minutes, no more, the sea was obscured by a storm of intense murk and fury. When it cleared, the *Ariel* was not to be seen. Through a week there was an almost telepathic agony of suspense between Lerici and Pisa. Mary Shelley, Jane Williams, Leigh Hunt, Byron, Edward Trelawny, who now becomes a chief personage in our story, and, it must be added, Clare, who was with the other women at Lerici, nursed a slowly sinking hope. On the third day Trelawny, who had been active in his enquiries, called at the Lanfranchi Palace and, hearing that there was no news from Lerici, told his fears to Byron and Hunt. "Byron's lip quivered," he says, "and his voice faltered as he questioned me." On the Friday, Mary and Jane, their anxiety transformed into terror by a letter from Hunt asking Shelley

how he had fared, posted to Pisa. At two o'clock in the morning Mary staggered into Byron's room, and learnt that her husband had indeed sailed four days before. In despair she started back for Lerici at nine the next morning, with Mrs. Williams and Trelawny. At Via Reggio they heard that part of the *Ariel's* equipment had been washed ashore, and realised that no hope was left. On July 16th or 17th the body of Williams was found on the beach by Trelawny; on the 18th, that of Shelley.

That Byron conducted himself decently on this occasion is no particular credit to him; people at such times do behave well. But Mary Shelley some time later, after writing him several letters expressing her gratitude for his many kindnesses, accused him to Mrs. Williams of parsimoniously refusing to help her; and Leigh Hunt for his part accused him of the darkest infamy in neglecting his duties to Shelley's memory, that is to say, to *The Liberal*, that is to say, to Leigh Hunt. The facts of the case may be presented with as little comment as possible.

Before giving Trelawny permission to remove the bodies of his dead friends, the authorities insisted on cremation on the spot, in accordance with their health regulations. At these famous ceremonies, the details of which were arranged entirely by Trelawny with his usual effective vigour, he was present with Byron and Hunt. Shelley's body was burnt, on August 16th, on the seashore about a mile north of Via Reggio. The spot, a sandy desolation of scrub and sea-grass, with the pinewoods in the near background and the snow-capped Apennines beyond, is today marked by a wooden shanty called "Bagno di Shelley." While Trelawny superintended the almost savage rites, the August sun blazing down on the oil-fed flames of the funeral pyre, Hunt remained in the carriage, and after a time Byron, able to bear the sight no longer, swam out to his yacht that was lying off-shore. There is a story of a drunken dinner after this harrowing scene, and a wild night-drive back through the woods to Pisa. Nerves have played people queerer tricks than that. Shelley's ashes were taken away by Trelawny, afterwards to be placed in the Protestant cemetery at Rome.

Byron was found to be one of the executors under Shelley's will, also a beneficiary to the extent of two thousand pounds. The legacy he refused. On October 6th he wrote to Mary, "With regard to any difficulties about money, I can only repeat that I will be your banker till this state of things is cleared up, . . . so there is little to hinder you on that score." What he actually did does not seem to be recorded, but there is no reason to suppose that he went back on his word. It is true that in July 1823 Mrs. Shelley made the complaint above referred to. But Hunt's exactions had by that time become insupportable, and when Mary's application, instead of being made direct, was presented through that now extremely unsympathetic medium, Byron was not encouraged to liberality. The sum of the matter, so far as we know it, is that he declined the two thousand pounds, that he is likely to have abided by the offer of October 6th, and that he discharged his duties as an executor faithfully, employing Hanson to retain the interest of Shelley's father for Mary. No doubt, having done much, he was once again duly reproached for not having done more.

Shelley gone, Byron found himself with Leigh Hunt very formidably on his hands. He felt the responsibility, but hated it. He honestly tried to deal fairly with the situation. He told his friends that, like it or not, the position was largely of his own making, and that he could not let Hunt down. But Hunt was as difficult as he could be. All his defects of taste and character came into play. He acutely felt the loss of Shelley both as a friend and as an ally, but, having suffered it, proceeded to consider Byron as a man whose chief purpose naturally would be to cheat him in some way. Byron's sensitiveness to other people's moods, however carefully they were guarded, has already been noted. "Byron has remarkable penetration in discovering the characters of those around him," says Lady Blessington; "he must have pierced disguises in a moment," adds Sir Egerton Brydges. He would be aware of Hunt's wholly unwarranted misgivings as soon as they were formed, and would be proudly but resentfully silent. And Hunt very conspicuously was not alone. There were six children, "dirtier and more mis-

chievous than Yahoos. What they can't destroy with their filth they will with their fingers." Hunt thought this view unreasonable; thought his children models of deportment. But he had theories about natural education, and having for years supported a large family on small means, his ideas of noise and cleanliness may not have been Byron's. And after all it was Byron's house. Moreover, Hunt thought it good for Byron to be taken down a peg or two, and saw nothing unseemly in his two elder boys making fun of their host in the next room. And then there was Marianna, Mrs. Hunt. She treated Byron with studied insolence, taking the wrong liberties with unerring judgment. Hunt was delighted; this was to teach the Noble Lord what social equality really was; very wholesome indeed for him to have Marianna about the house, a living example of the democratic realities. Hunt himself stood no nonsense. Obligation to Byron's purse by no means meant time-serving on Byron's opinions, and Hunt was happy to be able to inform the world that he had not been seduced by a trifling six hundred pounds or so into flattering his benefactor's "worldly commonplaces" and "bad jests on women." So that any tedium that Medwin might notice at the Casa Lanfranchi was enlivened by the Hunt family with a display of consistently bad manners.

And for what was Byron putting up with all this? He was happy enough to acknowledge old favours, and handsomely, but a week or two sickened him of the Hunt Kraal, as he called it, downstairs, and without Shelley's guiding enthusiasm he had no real interest left in this journalistic enterprise, which in the cold light of reflection seemed rather a crazy business. Also, a very uncomfortable business. The four numbers of *The Liberal*, published from October 1822 to July 1823, are of bibliographical interest to-day to students of Byron and Shelley; but when they appeared, Shelley was dead and Byron got nothing but bedevillings for his share in them. Hobhouse protested, Moore protested, Murray protested, everybody protested. The press shook itself into paroxysms. Hunt had enlisted Hazlitt and one or two other powerful contributors, but they could not subdue the outcry. *The Liberal* was thoroughly and almost uni-

versally damned. And the worst of it was that Byron had no heart in the thing. No man had more courage in the face of criticism than he, and no man was ever called on to meet more unscrupulous onsets of it on his own account. But here he was, abused by his friends and caught at a very telling disadvantage by his adversaries, all for a venture that was not his own and with which he had no active sympathy. He confessed to Murray that he was afraid that the journal would not do, but come what might he could not just drop it and leave Hunt stranded. He had been misguided in joining the enterprise, no doubt, but this reflection did not help. He could not now even walk across the bridge and tell Shelley what he thought of him.

Hunt complained that *The Liberal* failed because Byron did not take it seriously enough. *The Vision of Judgment* and *The Blues* and *Heaven and Earth*—these were not the Byron that the public wanted, and he ought to have used the journal as his real platform, not as a waste-paper basket. Hunt, blaming Byron and daily lamenting Shelley, hung about the place from week to week, disillusioned and teased into resentments that were neither rational nor decent. When, late in 1822, Byron had to move to Genoa, Hunt, all the Hunts, accompanied him, and continued to live on his subsidies. Byron gave copyrights to *The Liberal*, and publishing rights in *The Island*, *The Age of Bronze*, and some cantos of *Don Juan*, to Leigh Hunt's brother John. He also supported the Hunt establishment, which at Genoa he was careful to see was not under his own roof.

Hunt remained in Italy after Byron left for Greece, and returned to England in 1825. After a time he wrote his recollections of Byron, which appeared as the first chapter of *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* in 1828. Hunt may have had some fair sense of grievance about *The Liberal* and his misadventures at Pisa and Genoa. It is difficult to see that Byron had acted ungenerously, but if he paid a good deal out to Hunt in board and lodging and actual money, it may reasonably be argued that he was only squaring an account that his own imprudence had opened. But the account might at least have been looked upon as squared. Not at all so by Leigh Hunt. He

had merits of character, as has been allowed, but in this record of Byron all the second-rateness in him took control. And very discreditable control it was. In a temper that can be described as nothing less than savagery, he sets out to deprive Byron's reputation of every vestige of common decency. In plain words he declares him to have been a liar, ill-tempered, vain, jealous, mean, incurably dishonest, touched with madness, and a coward, hinting that he died in Greece of mere fright; in short, a monster who should have spent his time between Bedlam and the gaol. Everything is turned to Hunt's nefarious purpose. Byron visits him in prison, and takes books to him, which he carries in himself instead of causing them to be delivered by his servant. Which natural friendliness Hunt interprets as showing that Byron "by flattering one's vanity [was anxious to persuade us] of his own freedom from it." Hunt spends pages in fussy assurances that he was insensible to distinctions of rank and that in using a ceremonious form of address to Byron he was not acting from any servility; but when Byron, tired of this fooling, chaffed him by beginning a letter "Dear Lord Hunt," we are told of the incident as illustrating his petulance. These misjudged examples recoil inevitably on Hunt himself, nowhere more prettily than in the following: "He gravely asked me one day, 'What it was that convinced me in argument?' I said, I thought I was convinced by the strongest reasoning. 'For my part,' said he, 'it is the last speaker that convinces me.'" In this perfect moment of dramatic dialogue Hunt admirably reveals both himself and Byron. In other words, Hunt, as they say, never saw the way Byron was going.

In innumerable details Hunt presses his detrimental case. Byron had but a small knowledge of books, had no address, was weak in the voice with an indistinct articulation, his eyes were set too near one another, his jaw was too big for the upper part of his face, and the face generally too large for his head. He had married for money, his regard for the Guiccioli was "founded solely on her person," and he had never been in love in his life. He was "as fond as a footman of communicating unpleasant intelligence"; if he did any one a service, "he con-

trived either to blow a trumpet before it or to see that others blew one for him." The invective fortunately is so unrelieved as wholly to discredit itself, but the style of its presentation, although it is deplorably vulgar, is by no means ineffective, for Hunt was a skilful writer. But the effectiveness does not save him from being intolerable. Hard hitting in controversy and plain speaking in self-defence are well enough, but when we remember that, after all, Byron kept Hunt and his family of seven on pretty ample terms for something over a year, this self-justification at the expense of a friend—as Hunt generally calls Byron when he does not call him the noble Bard—who was dead, becomes as low a piece of treachery as can be found in the annals of literature. It was made worse by a snivelling affectation of candour. Hunt has a dreadful way of protesting that he does not want to say deleterious things, and saying them. He has to speak the truth, "because Lord Byron made no scruple of speaking very freely about me and mine." Byron, in fact, spoke to Medwin shrewdly but not ungenerously of Hunt as a writer, and with no offence whatever of him as a man, but here really lay the grievance that released three hundred pages of shameless misrepresentation. Then, Hunt further explains, he must be comprehensive; "I would not say anything about it, nor about twenty other matters, but that they hang together more or less, and are connected with the truth of a portrait which it has become necessary for me to paint." Hunt knew very well that neither truth nor necessity had anything to do with it; he was paying off what he conceived to be an old score, and doing it with neither taste nor honour.

As he proceeds he becomes revolting. "O Truth! what scrapes of portraiture have you not got me into!" And, finally, after a hundred and fifty pages not one of which is free of malice and false witnessing, "Good God! . . . when I think of these things, I feel as if I could shed tears over . . . my resentments. . . . Nor could anything have induced me to give a portrait of Lord Byron and his infirmities, if I had not been able to say at the end of it, that his faults were not his own. . . ." At which point the measure of our contempt for this performance over-

flows. When Hunt's attack on Byron met with some of the castigation that it deserved, he plunged into an amplified vindication of himself in a preface to the second edition of his book. He does not mend his case. "All this will not hinder me from continuing to be sincere. I shall remain so to my dying day, knowing what an effect one strenuous example has upon society." Hunt upon occasion could use this spirit finely in a good cause; he was here using it shamefully in a bad one. In his frenzied egoism he stopped, or would stop, at nothing. "The passage is quoted where Byron speaks of my 'not very tractable children.' Thank God, they were not tractable to him! I have something very awful to say on that point, in case it is forced from me." That finally puts Hunt outside the pale in the matter. He would not have dared to say this or any of the other monstrous things that he did if Byron had been alive. He acted the part of a poltroon, and his conduct cannot be excused. It is fair to him to say that twenty years later, in his *Autobiography*, he tried to make amends, accusing himself of unworthy motives in publishing what he confessed should never have been written. But although he regretted what he had said, and was ashamed of it, he did not explicitly withdraw it; and in any estimate of Leigh Hunt's character, so admirable in many ways, the volume of 1828 must remain in damaging witness against him.

In the meantime Byron's political position had become daily more difficult. The police were watching the Gambas, but Byron was now receiving their attentions for reasons other than his connection with that family. He had issued a manifesto sympathetic to the insurgents, and he had joined the Carbonari, a revolutionary body pledged against Austrian rule and aiming at social reconstruction. One of its professed objects, says Hobhouse slyly, was to moralise the marriage state. The authorities would only be too glad of a chance to have this interfering Englishman removed. One day as Byron was returning with Shelley, Trelawny, and Pietro Gamba from his ride in the country beyond the Pisa gate, a dragoon hustled them in his haste to reach the town in time for his muster-roll. There was a scuffle and an altercation. Byron, not, as he says, very good at uniforms,

challenged the offending officer, to be mortified on finding that he was only a sergeant-major. The disputants had collected a rabble by the time they reached the Lanfranchi Palace, in front of which there was an uproar. Shelley received a clout on the head, and the dragoon a dig from a pitchfork. The case went into the courts, and although the criminal charges brought against some of the Lanfranchi servants were dismissed, the upshot of the affair was that the Gambas and Byron were told to move on. They accordingly went to Montenero, but that in turn was the scene of another affray, and the Gambas, father and son, were thereupon ordered to leave Tuscany altogether. Officially Byron was not implicated, but the effect on him was the same. The papal decree provided that Teresa should reside with her father; she had, therefore, to leave with him, and Byron had no choice but to accompany them. But this pillar-to-post way of living was very trying. It meant restlessness without activity, a growing confusion of purpose, or a whittling away of any purpose at all. Vague discontent, not with the Guiccioli, but with conditions that bothered without bracing him, was slowly shaping into an idea. In August he speaks again of his American project, but adds that he is "fluctuating between it and Greece." For the moment, however, he decided on remaining with the Gamba family. After some postponement and temporary leave to return to Pisa, the expulsion order was enforced, and at the end of September we find them at Genoa, with the Hunts and Mary Shelley in the same town.

9

Genoa, apart from his preparations for Greece, adds little to our knowledge of Byron. He stood by his bargain with Hunt, more than stood by it, but did not seek his company. Helping him was, he said, like pulling a man out of the river who immediately threw himself in again. Mary Shelley also he saw but seldom, though he found employment for her in transcribing *The Age of Bronze* and the later cantos of *Don Juan*. "Temperate as an anchorite," he was yet in very uncertain health; "since

. . . I was fool enough to swim some four miles under a broiling sun, at Via Reggio, I have been more or less ailing." Incensed by what he took to be persistent disregard of his instructions, he announced to Murray that he should withdraw from him as a publisher. This resolution was made after a long series of complaints about proof reading, neglected orders, unanswered letters, and sundry other slack or high-handed behaviour at Albemarle Street. Murray was, in fact, flustered about *Don Juan*, the publication of which after the fifth canto was transferred to John Hunt. Murray did not fancy the responsibility himself, but he was none too accommodating when a rival appeared. Byron, as we have seen, also gave Hunt *The Age of Bronze* and *The Island*. The relations with Murray in general terms were unaffected by the difference, though the occasion for correspondence ceased with the new arrangement, and Byron's letters to his old publisher, which had been constant, came to an abrupt end in December 1822, only one further example being found between that date and the poet's death sixteen month's later. John Hunt, however, did not much mend matters. Proofs were as disconcerting as ever, and Hunt's position as sponsor of *Don Juan* was not improved by the prosecution brought against him for publishing *The Vision of Judgment*. In this connection Byron offered to return to England and stand his trial in Hunt's place. The case was not heard until after Byron's death, when Hunt was fined a hundred pounds.

An occasional ghost drifted upon him out of his past: such a far-distant past it had become in a very few years. One of these was James Wedderburn Webster, now knighted, estranged from his wife, and still owing Byron a thousand pounds. Byron was genial, had some ineffectual design for bringing about a reconciliation, and complained to Kinnaird that the debtor might at least have offered a little interest. In fact he offered nothing, and all Byron had was a bond that he supposed Hanson or somebody else might buy. Also new acquaintances were formed, one or two of which have become celebrated. Trelawny had remained in touch with him after Shelley's death, and was to take a prominent part in the coming Greek negotiations. But

PLATE XI

LORD BYRON.

From a Sketch by Count D'Orsay, taken in May, 1823.

the addition particularly made to the Byron gallery by Genoa is Lady Blessington, who seems to have impressed the poet's best friends in history very favourably. Our own opinion is less enthusiastic. She was a year younger than Byron, and a woman of uncommon beauty and some literary gifts. Her early life had been dismally unfortunate. While still a child she was forced by her parents into a shocking marriage. Her husband, who was mad before he married her, became madder afterwards, and finally jumped out of a window. This was in 1817. A few months later she married Charles Gardiner, first Earl of Blessington, seven years her senior, and her second venture was a more fortunate one. In April 1823 she turned up at Genoa with Lord Blessington, with whom Byron had already some acquaintance, having once been on the point of lending him money on mortgage, and an introduction was not necessary. For two months Byron and the Blessingtons were on terms of some intimacy, of which we have the record in *Conversations of Lord Byron with the Countess of Blessington*, published in 1834.

As a leader of wit and literary society in London, as the lavish dispenser of a great fortune, and as a courageous worker when that fortune was exhausted, Lady Blessington was justly admired no less than for her personal charm and beauty. But she concerns us only as Byron's friend. In this capacity she has been much eulogised. Moore knew the Blessingtons, and was happy to receive a complimentary word concerning them from Byron. When he first published his *Life*, Lady Blessington's memoir had not appeared, but he quotes from it in a later edition without any suggestion of disapproval. Jeaffreson, with no reference to the memoirs, was respectful about the friendship, if no more. Lord Ernle is sympathetic. Mr. Nicolson, without being quite that, is too grateful for a tone so irresistibly provoking to his own inspired humour not to tender her his best thanks. But Mr. John Murray, the present head of the house, is unequivocal. He thinks Lady Blessington more probably than any other woman would have been the ideal match for Byron, that as his wife she would have changed—for the better it must be—the whole course of his life, and that the *Conversations* is "one of the most inter-

esting and illuminating accounts of him which exist." Against which cumulative approval I have to submit my own view that the *Conversations* is probably the book of all those written about Byron that he himself would most bitterly have resented.

This is not to suggest that it is the most frankly antagonistic of them all. There is, for example, a *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Byron*, written by a John Watkins and published (anonymously) in 1822, that to the tune of four hundred pages identifies our poet with the Beast of the Apocalypse, and calls upon Gifford to use his authority and destroy this menace to civilisation. Leigh Hunt, again, far exceeds Lady Blessington in vehemence; but then Hunt's malice, as we have seen, is patent, and defeats itself. Nor is Lady Blessington untrustworthy, as Medwin is; and yet Medwin's untrustworthiness has never, as it seems to us, done Byron any serious harm. Trelawny's antipathy, of which we shall speak, is so easily accountable, so simple in its motives, that it amuses rather than disturbs us. But John Watkins apoplectic, Hunt vindictive and gross, Medwin credulous, and Trelawny shiftily jealous, are none of them so difficult as Lady Blessington with her urbane and yet, we suspect, far from disinterested innuendo. Also, she is painfully unobservant of the rules of candour.[1]

Byron would not be insensible of the lady's attractions. Her bright engaging manner was, no doubt, welcome in his uneventful world at Genoa. They would chaff each other in bad verses, she was clever enough to understand and flatter his moods, and being an extremely good horsewoman she was an effective partner for the daily rides. Byron had neither cause nor inclination to be churlish about her obvious recommendations. She was, too, indirectly in touch with Lady Byron through a friend in Genoa, and even unprofitable gossip from that source always exercised a sort of mesmerism on Byron's mind. Finally, with the Blessingtons was the young Count D'Orsay, already a leader of fashion and elegant accomplishment. Sensationally handsome, a notable athlete, a master of gallantry and manners, a gifted

1 The few pages devoted to Byron in Lady Blessington's *Idler in Italy*, published five years later than the *Conversations*, are less mischievous.

artist, and a writer of promise, he was far too sensible not to know the cordiality with which Byron received him for the honour it was. We have but a glimpse of the brief association between the two men, but it is a very pleasing one. D'Orsay, aged twenty-two, showed Byron, aged thirty-five, his manuscript memoirs, and was rewarded by genuine admiration. Byron encouraged his young friend with charming diffidence. It was all a little poignant; the thirteen years between them, what strange spectral years they seemed. This boy—and then he would realise that he had never felt quite like that about anybody before. Byron was the head of a great family, in demonstrative moments he signed himself Peer of England, and then there was Harrow and Cambridge and, in a favourite phrase of his, all that. But where was the family, and where was Newstead, and what did all the Peers of England care about him, and what precisely had he allowed to happen since he also was twenty-two with the world in front of him? Still, it was no good being sentimental; things had long since gone beyond that, so good luck to Alfred D'Orsay anyway. D'Orsay made a delightful drawing of Byron; the poet asked if he would add a cap to the figure—it would complete the costume, and, what was more to the purpose, it would hide some of the wrinkles on his forehead.

And so the society of the Blessingtons was the more welcome because of their young *attaché*. The Guiccioli says that Lady Blessington's memoir "cannot be suspected of partiality; for, whether justly or not, she did not enjoy Lord Byron's sympathy, and knew it; she had also to forgive him various little circumstances which had wounded her *amour propre*." Byron, when discussing the Greek proposals with Teresa, found her, he told Hobhouse, in a "fit of jealousy of Lady Blessington, with whom I have merely a common acquaintance, as she is an authoress." There is no reason to suppose that Lady Blessington desired closer attentions from Byron than he offered, but there is a suggestion that she would have liked the opportunity of declining them. After all, it was rather mortifying to find a man who had done so much refusing to do so little. And so Byron, for all his genius and an air, was, she had to report, a creature of

many imperfections. She is careful not to overdo it. His appearance is "remarkably gentlemanlike," his features striking, his countenance full of expression. But there is, we learn, nothing of the hero about him, his clothes don't fit, and his movements are awkward. His manners are not cold and haughty, as she had been led to expect; on the contrary, he betrays a "total want of that natural self-possession and dignity which ought to characterise a man of birth and education." He is anxious to talk only of himself, he is petulantly superstitious, his pride is that of a *parvenu*, he boasts of the anonymous love-letters that he receives, his taste in dress and furniture is vulgar; he is a charlatan, a poseur, and an intellectual philanderer: "this instability of opinion, or expression of opinion, of Byron, destroys all confidence in him." There is hardly a page of the book that has not some such insinuating word of disparagement. Lady Blessington designs to give us many of Byron's sayings, but she is not a skilful reporter. The *Conversations* have for the most part a curious air of unreality. Byron said something like these things, no doubt, but Lady Blessington has a remarkable aptitude, we cannot but feel, for giving us just something else. Byron is looking at the ships crowded in a harbour; he says, "Look at that forest of masts now before us! from what remote parts of the world do they come! o'er how many waves have they not passed, and how many tempests have they not been, and may again be exposed to! how many hearts and tender thoughts follow them! mothers, wives, sisters, and sweethearts, who perhaps at this hour are offering up prayers for their safety." But did Byron say that? We think not.

We think, moreover, that Byron all the time knew that this was just the sort of thing that Lady Blessington would make him say. We suspect that he teased her, and teasing was not exactly what she wanted. The worst of it was that Lady Blessington did what Lady nobody ought to have done. She accepted Byron's very civil offers to show her the sights of Genoa, courted his company as a riding companion, sought him as a guest at her dinners, and then played up to what she supposed were his weaknesses for all her considerable talent was worth.

Then she went to her room, took her note-book out, and recorded his frailties while they were fresh in her mind. Which was not nice of her. Not that she recorded nothing else; she was too shrewd, in fact even too amiable, for that, but the book takes its general tone from Byron's blemishes as seen by Lady Blessington's modish resentment. But what Lady Blessington did not see was that while she was slyly exploiting Byron's defects, he was quite well aware of what she was doing, and manipulated the defects for her benefit. Half the caprice that she observed was, we feel as we read, carefully devised, and he could fool her in compliment no less than in mischief. "You have such a provoking memory," he exclaims, "that you compare notes of all one's different opinions, so that one is sure to get into a scrape," and Lady Blessington is all unsuspecting complacency. So that if Byron were to object to her book, he might at least be told that he had got what he asked for. But the temper of it does seem to be prejudiced by the fact that he did not ask for something else.

10

"Towards the end of February, 1823," says Count Pietro Gamba, Byron "turned his thoughts towards Greece." An influential Greek committee, of which Hobhouse was a member, had been formed in London, and in April Byron heard that he had been unanimously elected to that body. He replied that he was much honoured, that his heart was in the cause, and that he hoped to justify the confidence placed in him. For some weeks he was uncertain what he would, or could, do. He was willing to lend his name, for what it was worth, and that both in Greece and in London was considered to be a good deal; he was also willing to lend money with a free hand. But what he really wanted was to engage in active service, fighting if need be, or at least taking some responsibility in the coming revolution on the spot. About the Greeks individually he was sceptical; he could even compare them unfavourably to the Turks. But he knew that the very character that he distrusted was the consequence

of many generations of Turkish tyranny, and Greek independence as an abstract principle excited all his chivalry and courage. This was no mere local squabble into which he was being cajoled, but a cause worthy of the name, one to which a poet of liberty might very splendidly give himself. We have to be clear about this at the outset. Once he had set himself to the enterprise, he considered it in a severely practical light that has been very disconcerting to some visionary minds. Romantic gossip, looking to him for slogans, was shocked when he started off by declaring that what the Greeks first wanted was field artillery, gunpowder, and medical stores. Lady Blessington was affected in this way. "The idea of the greatest poet of his day sacrificing his fortune, his occupations, his enjoyments—in short, offering up on the altar of liberty all the immense advantages which station, fortune, and genius can bestow," was so exceedingly pleasant to contemplate that it was really too bad of him to insist on discussing it in terms of uniforms and supplies and loans. "His whole manner and conversation on the subject," indeed, were "calculated to chill the admiration such an enterprise ought to create, and to reduce it to a more ordinary standard." It did not occur to Lady Blessington that Byron was not offering his fortune and possibly his life precisely for the purpose of exciting her admiration. Greek independence meant hard campaigns, no "roughing it on a beefsteak and a bottle of port," and he knew it. He knew that it meant gunpowder and guns and bandages and money, and not parlour heroics with Lady Blessington. In fact, with this quite serious business in hand, the sooner she was chilled the better. But our sense of the very able and unsentimental way in which Byron tackled the preliminaries of his job, does not obscure the spiritual ardour by which he was inspired, an ardour of which Lady Blessington and her like knew nothing. And it was not his business to instruct them. If they wanted to chatter about the altar of liberty, he was not going to chatter with them. He happened to know what the altar of liberty was.

So much for the abstract merits of this new interest in his life. Its personal aspects were equally satisfactory. Here at

last was something that might revive his drooping energies and provide his hungry faculties with a purpose. Poetry—he had written such a lot of poetry, and it was difficult to see what more could come of it. If he had been in England, in close contact with the results of his work, it would have been different; but here in Italy, although poetry for its own sake was all very well, this periodic despatch of manuscripts to Murray or Hunt as to oblivion was perhaps becoming rather a barren satisfaction. Poetry, in any case, would be none the worse for a rest, and he had always nursed a hope that some challenge of this sort might come. Now he was stirred by it; and it might mean redemption not only for Greece.

There was the problem of Teresa. The suggestion, often made, that Byron's chief incentive for going to Greece was to get away from the Guiccioli may be dismissed as an impertinence. What happened was that she, being extremely fond of Byron, and having grown to be dependent on his society, used every argument she could to dissuade him from going to a war in which she had no personal interest. Her grievance was not that he was going away in order to leave her, but that he was going away at all. Byron thought her unreasonable in this, as he very well might do without being tired of her. At length her rather admirable obstinacy drove him to exclaim to Hobhouse and Kinnaird against the inconsiderateness of the "absurd womankind," and he declared that she alone was the obstacle to his immediate departure. That this was so hardly points to his indifference to her wishes. It is true that he speaks of a possible reconciliation between her and her husband, or, failing that, of her return to Ravenna with her father, whose sentence of exile from that city seems to have been revoked on condition that he should take his daughter back with him. But these were expedients in Byron's mind to meet the present difficulty. The argument is not that he was unwilling to leave the Guiccioli; he was admittedly quite ready to do this. It is, first, that his readiness to do so was a consequence of his new venture and not the cause of it; and secondly, that he was, in explicit assurances, looking forward to returning to her within a few months. Greatly to her credit,

she finally wished to accompany him to Greece; equally to Byron's, he refused to let her go.

On June 15th, 1823, Byron wrote to Trelawny: "You must have heard that I am going to Greece. Why do you not come with me? I want your aid, and am exceedingly anxious to see you." Edward John Trelawny was now thirty-one years old, that is, four years younger than Byron. At school he had thrashed his master, and had afterwards turned seafaring adventurer with a flair for literature. He found Shelley six months before the tragedy of Via Reggio, and knew him from the first for a great poet and a great man. His devotion to Shelley was, indeed, the most genial and the most intelligent thing about a long and turbulent life. Shelley's exquisite culture, his gentleness, his intellectual authority, made an immediate and lasting appeal to this circus genius who was by way of being a professional wild man. For we must allow Trelawny a touch of genius; that and his affection for Shelley are perhaps all that we can allow. Mr. Nicolson says bluntly that he "was a liar and a cad." He could, it is to be feared, be both those things, but, when all is considered, we may take this as less than a generous summary of his character. He was fine about Shelley; he did get things done; he was personally brave; he hated self-indulgence—of sorts; and he wrote the remarkable *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron*,[1] and the powerful though incoherent *Adventures of a Younger Son* (1831), which would have quickened the pulse of the author of *Glenarvon*. Some account of his life will be found in the preface written by Mr. Edward Garnett in 1890 for a new edition of Trelawny's novel, which is itself autobiographical in a lurid and undisciplined way. Mr. Garnett does full justice to Trelawny's treatment of Shelley, and he accepts the picture of Byron with that of the other poet. But this is just what we cannot do. Trelawny liked Shelley, and was all benevolence about him; he did not like Byron, and was studiously dishonest in making the contrast between the two as unfavourable as possible to the older man.

[1] Published in 1858, and in a revised form in 1878 as *Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author.*

Byron, Trelawny tells us then, was neither just nor generous, and "never drew his weapon to redress any wrongs but his own." He was of a "soft, lymphatic temperament" that ran quickly to corpulence without strict self-restraint, but this Trelawny allows to have been exercised by Byron as he had never known it to be by any other man; though he would gobble up his "mess of cold potatoes, rice, fish or greens, deluged in vinegar, like a famished dog." Trelawny admits Byron's courage, never doubting "that if he had drawn his sword in Greece he would have thrown away the scabbard," and he found him the best companion he had ever known on shipboard, cheerful, giving no trouble, making no complaints, and, best of all, assuming no authority. It was, however, Byron, not Shelley, who was the real Snake[1]; he was mastered by pride and vanity, he knew nothing about people, forming all his opinions from books, he was incapable of sincere feeling, and Shelley's death, we are told, *irritated* him. The cause of this animosity is, as we have said, not difficult to discover. In the first place, Trelawny was just the kind of man from whom Byron carefully withheld his real self. Trelawny was, with all his abilities, something of an ass. He gives an absurd account of his having bidden Byron to write a poem on board ship upon a given theme, whereupon the poet was "as crest-fallen as a riotous boy, suddenly pounced upon by a master and given an impossible task, scrawling and scratching out, sadly perplexed." Trelawny kept intruders away, until Byron in despair threw the fragments of his manuscript overboard. So that Trelawny's fond illusion that he could read Byron like an open book was formed in circumstances that no doubt often made Byron feel that Trelawny was an uncommonly tiresome fellow, and the book would be closed with a snap. But the chief cause of Trelawny's dislike was at once cruder and deeper than this. We get a glimpse of his personal appearance from a manuscript journal kept by one Major D'Arcy Bacon in 1825, when he spent some time in the famous cave of Odysseus, the chieftain to whom Trelawny had, in Mr. Nicolson's carefully chosen word, deserted. "Trelawny was attired in complete Albanian costume, his long

[1] Byron's nickname for Shelley.

hair, after the fashion of the Suliots, flowing over his bare neck, sunburnt breast and countenance, bronzed by long exposure to sun and rain; in stature above the ordinary height, in the prime of manhood, he pourtrayed a figure not less martial and characteristic of the warlike Roumeliot, than the wildest among the bands which were reclining on all sides." The Major's brushwork is rough, but the portrait would have delighted the sitter. That is exactly what Trelawny felt of himself. He fancied himself as a man of action, with no nonsense about him. The trouble was that Byron, especially in the later days of the acquaintance, was also fancying himself rather in this way, and that was what Trelawny could not bear. Shelley was a poet, and stuck to being a poet. But Byron, with his athletic capers, and amateur excursions, and professions of endurance, and now with his martial pretensions, was encroaching on Trelawny's prerogative. Just because he had money, here he was setting up for a national hero, instead of keeping to his poetry. How much better it would have been for him to subsidise Trelawny, so that he, Trelawny, could become a national hero, which would so eminently have been the right man in the right place. So Trelawny thought, and kept on thinking it. "Poets are rarely men of action, their mental energy exhausts their bodily powers. Byron has been generally considered an exception to this rule, he certainly so considered himself: let us look at the facts." And Trelawny looks at them, and finds that "in 1809, he first left England, rode on horseback through Spain and Portugal, 400 miles, crossed the Mediterranean on board a frigate, and landed in Greece; where he passed two years in sauntering through a small portion of that country: this, with a trip to Smyrna, Constantinople, Malta, and Gibraltar, generally on board our men-of-war, where you have all the ease, comfort, and most of the luxuries of your own home;—this is the extent of the voyages and travels he was so proud of." Not at all a real traveller like Trelawny, who further observes that Byron moved about like a Pasha, instead of travelling with a knapsack like a man. "He bragged, too, of his prowess in riding, boxing, fencing, and even walking," proceeds Trelawny later in his book, adding chival-

rously, "but to excel in these things feet are as necessary as hands." He allows that Byron did well in the water, since in that element "a fin is better than a foot," but even there Trelawny, it seems, had no difficulty in teaching him his place, though he magnanimously refrained from pressing his advantage when he saw Byron's mortification, and so allowed himself to be beaten. Energy was the thing for this world, and energy was just what Byron lacked; Trelawny indeed was often tempted to take matters into his own hands, but unfortunately people persisted in looking on Byron as the important member of the expedition, and Trelawny, moreover, only had fifty pounds in his pocket, while Byron had ten thousand in an iron chest.

And so, when Byron asked him to join his company for Greece, Trelawny "urged him on, for I was bent on travel and willing to go anywhere." He became exceedingly impatient as he waited on Byron's decisions, but the odd thing is that he did wait on them. He saw the situation, however, very clearly. "The negotiations with the committee occupied some months before Byron, perplexed in the extreme, finally committed himself. He might well hesitate. It would have been difficult to find a man more unfit for such an enterprise; but he had a great name, and that was all the committee required." And all the time there was Trelawny, knowing very well who the right man was. The truth is that Trelawny cuts a very unattractive figure in Byron's life. We shall hear of him again casually only, but this note must not omit one further reference. Trelawny was away from Missolonghi when Byron died, but returned in time to see his friend's body. Byron's lameness had always excited Trelawny's curiosity, and this could now be gratified. Sending Fletcher out of the room for a glass of water, he uncovered Byron's feet, and gazed his full on the deformity that he found. He had ample time, for Fletcher could find nothing but slimy salt water, and went into the town to borrow a bottle of porter. Trelawny gives us the result of his observations with ghoulish delight, and on the next page writes with superb shamelessness, "Knowing and sympathising with Byron's sensitiveness, his associates avoided prying into the cause of his lameness; so did strangers, from good breed-

ing or common humanity." Fletcher came back to surprise these reflections, and Trelawny was interested to note that, as the faithful simpleton replaced the shroud, he was very nervous and trembled, no doubt because Byron had threatened to haunt him if any one was allowed to see his feet, either before his death or after. Decidedly Trelawny could be a cad on occasion.

At length Byron's preparations were completed. The Guiccioli had retired to Bologna. He had arranged his finances, collecting what cash he could and appointing agents, he had sold his yacht to Lord Blessington for four hundred pounds, had chartered the brig *Hercules*, "a collier-built tub of 120 tons, round-bottomed, and bluff-bowed," with which Trelawny was much dissatisfied, had been given representative powers as a Commissioner by the London committee, and had assembled his staff or suite. This consisted of Pietro Gamba, Trelawny, Dr. Francesco Bruno as medical attendant, and Fletcher with the other servants, including Tita, one of the heroes of the Pisan escapade who had been Byron's gondolier in Venice, and a negro engaged by Trelawny. The captain, John Scott, "one of the rough old John Bull stamp," had been taken on with the brig. He was an excellent captain, but inclined to be drunken during the first days of the voyage; however, he reformed under Byron's example, as we learn from Pietro Gamba. The *Hercules*, after one false start, left the harbour of Genoa on the evening of July 16th, 1823, and Byron had entered upon the last stage of his pilgrimage.

Chapter VI

APOTHEOSIS

(1823-1824)

"Farewell, all joys; O death, come close my eyes,
More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise."
—The Silver Swan.

1

A LAST word may here be said of Byron's poetry. To the works already considered have to be added *The Age of Bronze*, written in December and January 1822 and 1823, and *The Island*, written in the immediately succeeding weeks. The former as a satire modifies nothing that has been said. It is not at the top but not low down in Byron's achievement, is an interesting return to the heroic couplet, and shows his active study of current English politics. *The Island* is a romance in his earlier manner marked by the assurance of long practice. It contains some of his best descriptive passages, and the narrative force has at least lost none of its spirit. But the great work of Byron's last years is *Don Juan*. It was begun, as has been told, in the autumn of 1818, and Byron added cantos to the work at irregular intervals until by March 1823 sixteen had been completed; a seventeenth was found unfinished among his papers at Missolonghi after his death. As the early cantos arrived at Albemarle Street, Murray, Hobhouse, Kinnaird and others saw nothing but loss and perdition in them; they urged suppression; wrote arguments like counsel before a trial; twittered with apprehension. At first Byron acquiesced, then he told them to be damned. He knew the work was good, and if it caused trouble that was his business. Murray, after a furtive speculation on the first cantos, decided that at any rate it should not be his.

The Guiccioli, as we have seen, made Byron promise to discontinue the poem, but relented on being assured that Juan should behave better in future. Her letter acknowledging Byron's promise is characterised by Moore as "highly honourable to the fair writer." The press, or a section of it, was shocked at a depravity that might have been supposed to be beyond even Byron's compass. Gifford, however, told Murray that he was a fool for his pains, and that the work left no one decidedly above Byron but Shakespeare and Milton, while Shelley saw at once that here was an entirely new and, he added, a "surprisingly beautiful" thing in English poetry. The beauty of *Don Juan* has not been commonly remarked, but Shelley was precisely right. The objections first made against the poem are not in themselves wholly unreasonable. In parts it is lewd, it is bitter, it is savage, it is shocking; that is to say, it would be these things if it were not as a whole, and in its own idiom, "surpassingly beautiful." But this beauty lifts it utterly above all offence. Byron's plea that the poem was an exposure and not a celebration of vice was at best a concession to the cant morality of some of his friends who ought to have known better. To claim that *Don Juan* edifies us by its precepts is the folly of pretence indeed. We care nothing for its example. But that any one could be hurt by reading it, Hobhouse, for example, must have known in his heart to be as inconceivable as we know it.[1] It seems almost indelicate to acknowledge the complaints. The poem is not perfect. As a single work it sometimes seems too long, with weak periods, as Byron confessed; but this impression might have been removed had it been longer, that is, if the design had been completed. To judge a poem of over twelve thousand lines one has to test the impression formed from page to page by the architectural effect made by the whole when we have finished reading, and the architectural effect of *Don Juan* necessarily remains uncertain. But,

[1] I cannot refrain from quoting a note sent to me by Mr. Edward Marsh: "You may be amused to hear that my Great Uncle Spencer Walpole (the one who resigned the Home Secretaryship when the crowd pulled down the railings in Hyde Park), whom I remember as a dear old gentleman of great dignity, told my mother as a girl that *Don Juan* was the only book that had ever done him real harm; whereupon she took her scissors and cut it out of her Byron."

with these reservations, we can but add a modest word to the general eulogy that has recognised the greatest comic poem in our language. For that, all things considered, *Don Juan* is. On such a scale, with such indomitable energy, with so passionate a fertility of invention, and with resources of metre and diction so inexhaustible, the comic spirit in English verse has never approached this performance. It is the inspiration of *Don Juan* more than anything else that makes us conscious of the sublime impertinence of the Trelawnys and the Lady Blessingtons who thought to show off their wits against Byron's. Even the good friends, the Hobhouses, the Murrays, and the Moores, recede into diminutive distances as we are intoxicated by passage after passage of this transfiguring humour. Byron might well be tired for the moment of the circumstance of poetry—tired, that is, of sending packets to London; but the impetus of his genius, far from abating, was gathering force when he went to die at Missolonghi.

The *Hercules* reached Leghorn in five days, and here Byron took on board two Greeks, also a young Philhellenic Scotsman, Hamilton Browne, who advised the expedition, bound for Zante, to alter its course for Cephalonia, where they would find Colonel, afterwards Sir Charles, Napier in command, "the only man in office," says Trelawny, "favourably disposed to the Greeks and their cause." At first Byron was distant, almost morose, conscious it would seem of some fatality pressing upon his life, and not quite sure whether he was bidding for laurels or a foolscap. So long as he could keep the abstract idea of Greek independence fixed in his mind it was all right, but there were already signs of individual cupidity and shuffling that promised to make Liberty a rather bedraggled cause before all was over. However, faith prevailed, and as the voyage proceeded he regained his high spirits, clowning with Trelawny, encouraging Captain Scott's yarns, happy in what seemed to be renewing health of body and mind. His companions responded to his example: "We were all cheerful," says Pietro Gamba, in his valuable *Narrative of Lord Byron's Last Journey to Greece*, published in 1825. All, it should be said, except Fletcher, who, on being discovered by

Trelawny "squatting under the lee of the caboose . . . and drinking bottled porter," explained that he was making the most of his time and advised Trelawny to do the same, adding that plainly in leaving the comforts of Italy to go to a country of savages his master was not right in his mind.

At Leghorn Byron was greatly moved on receiving a complimentary poem from Goethe, to whom he replied that he could have desired no more favourable omen for his mission, on returning from which he intended to offer his homage at Weimar in person. The *Hercules* arrived at Argostoli, in Cephalonia, on August 3rd. Reports were none too hopeful. Greek was too much engaged in meeting Greek to pay proper attention to the Turk, and Byron got an impression that he was being enticed into the country with no specific purpose, but to be kept in waiting as a powerful ally for use as necessary. "Now they have got me thus far they think I must go on, and they care nothing as to the result. They are deceived; I won't budge a foot farther until I see my way." For a month the party remained on board the *Hercules* off Argostoli, paying frequent visits to the island, where Byron found a wise and steady counsellor in Colonel Napier. Messengers were sent to Corfu and Missolonghi to find out what they could, and in the meantime Byron and his friends passed the weeks pleasantly but with growing impatience. Dinner parties with the officers of the garrison, whose company affected Byron with a strange and unexpected nostalgia, an excursion across Ithaca, indolent days on the anchored *Hercules*, and evening rides, filled in the time. A nameless writer who met Byron in Ithaca gives some interesting particulars to be found in an appendix to *Medora Leigh* (1869). Byron's displeasure at waiting for orders that did not come was manifest, but he none the less showed what good company he could be. His domestic affairs being mentioned, he remarked, for the hundredth time, that though it might turn out that he had been "terribly in the wrong," he still was at a loss to know what he had done. He discussed literature, saying that Pope's *Homer* was the best translation in the world, indulging all his enthusiasm for Scott's novels, and extolling Hume as the profoundest thinker of the

eighteenth century. He acknowledged a compliment to his own poetry by "a little applausive tapping of his tobacco-box on the board on which he sat."

Byron, for all his good humour, was beginning to show serious signs of strain—the strain not only of these months and his present uncertainty, but of the last ten years. The improvement in his health that he had noticed on the voyage was very doubtful after all. One outing was made "in an elegant country boat with four rowers, and sundry packages and jars of eatables and drinkables." Trelawny at the tiller, Byron was the life of the party, talking at his best, seriously at first, and then relaxing as he called to Tita for two stone jars from which he mixed in tumblers "a most tempting beverage" which the narrator divinely calls gin-swizzle. The day went briskly enough, but the next morning Bruno announced that Byron had been seriously ill in the night. This had already happened once before, and the next night, shortly after Byron had gone early to bed, the party was alarmed by the terrified entrance of Bruno, crying out that Byron was in the throes of a violent seizure. Our anonymous chronicler was induced to go into the bedroom to see what he could do, only to find "his lordship half-undressed, standing in a far corner like a hunted animal at bay," and to be driven back by a well-aimed chair. Hamilton Browne then tried his persuasions, with better success. The fit passed, and the next morning Byron was very graciously himself again. But these convulsions boded no good.

Back at Argostoli he found news, but it was still indecisive. He therefore took a house on the island at Metaxata, and moved in with Gamba and Bruno, while Trelawny, agreeably assured that these delays were nothing more than humbug on the part of Byron, set off with Hamilton Browne into the Morea to find out the truth for himself. He did not see Byron alive again. Byron's caution, however, was in every sense justified. He had come to give, not to waste himself, and the sifting of intelligence on the spot was an intricate and tedious process; but it was necessary. Gamba tells us that as soon as it was known in Greece that an English noble of fabulous wealth was at Cephalonia, each party, "exerting every art to degrade its opponent," pestered him

with emissaries seeking his interest and, more anxiously, his money. "He occupied himself in discovering the truth, hidden as it was under these intrigues, and amused himself by confronting the agents of the different factions." But he was none the less intent on Greece, and on every responsibility that could properly be assigned to him. He took forty Suliots into his service as a bodyguard, who guarded him to distraction and, Gamba tells us, "agreed only in continually putting in fresh claims" for higher pay. Byron eventually shipped them to Missolonghi, to join the troops or await his possible arrival there. He did what he could to relieve local distress among the refugees who came in from the mainland, dealt with despatches from the Greek leaders and his other correspondence, employing Pietro Gamba as his secretary, and continued his riding and pistol practice. He read late into the nights, as, though he seemed otherwise to have recovered from his attacks, he was not sleeping well. Another diversion at Metaxata was provided by Dr. James Kennedy, a young Scotch doctor of thirty, who reminded Byron of Shelley. To look at, that is; in other respects he was as unlike Shelley as could be. He was a competent and kindly medical man, with a relentless passion for soul-saving. Finding some young men of education on the island, Scots like himself, who were sceptical on certain points of Christian doctrine, he undertook to convert them, and meetings were arranged for this purpose. Dr. Kennedy's sole condition was that he should be allowed to speak for twelve hours, at intervals, without interruption. Byron heard of this, and asked to be admitted to the discussions, though Dr. Kennedy had no discussions in his mind. He was told that he would be welcome, and attended the first session, which lasted four hours; but the pressing affairs of Greece prevented his attendance at subsequent congregations. Kennedy, however, interested Byron, who invited him to call. The result was a series of "conversations," of which we have the record in *Conversations on Religion with Lord Byron and Others*, published by John Murray in 1830. Kennedy pursued God with revivalist fanaticism, and his book is a masterpiece of shallow and pretentious piety. He was much put out at his first meeting by unlawful interruptions, chiefly from Byron:

was the Bible true? did the speaker believe in miracles? were they capable of proof by human testimony? until the doctor decided that it was unnecessary to go on, Byron evidently wishing "to be a speaker and no longer a hearer." Kennedy was relieved when Byron was absent at the next meeting, feeling that "his presence would have no good effect" upon the other probationers. He still found his hearers, however, "more disposed to talk than be attentive," one of them so far forgetting himself as to exclaim that the more Dr. Kennedy talked the more incomprehensible did it all become. The evangelist persevered, however, and when he had wrestled through his twelve hours—more than twelve before he had finished—he could reflect that, if any one of his flock should hereafter be damned, at least he could not plead ignorance. But he feared that they were stubborn hearts. Byron, in the special audiences, he found sympathetic but obstinate. Byron was always asking him if he had read something or another which he hadn't. Also he would mix up religion with poetry, and the poets were a pagan lot. Then, again, when he told Byron that he was in a bad way, he was met with, "But I am now in a fairer way. I already believe in predestination, and . . . ," whereas all that mattered was salvation. But must he not, Byron asked, be convinced about doctrines before coming to faith? Altogether Byron was much too argumentative. At times, indeed, almost offensive. On being told that he was like Shelley, Kennedy had to explain how lost a soul that was. But Shelley, it was urged, was a good man, with Christian virtues; "his benevolence was universal, and his charity far beyond his means." It then had to be explained that Christian virtues were useless unless they proceeded from Christian principles. "In the sight of God it is nothing, for He has declared that nothing is pleasing to Him, but what proceeds from a proper motive and principle"—that is, from tenets that unfortunately Shelley did not hold. Byron could not understand this; he even thought Kennedy lacking in tolerance. But it was not Kennedy's office to be tolerant; he had only to expound the truth. Shelley, he feared, was damned. But surely Kennedy did not believe in eternal punishment? Kennedy certainly did. These Socinians would, if this sort of thing were al-

lowed, "get rid of every doctrine in the Bible, and terminate in pure deism." For the life of him, Byron could not see it.

Byron was amused by Kennedy, no doubt; found him matter for his nimble wits. But he admired the man's sincerity in spite of everything, and listened to his interminable prosy arguments —the summary to them occupies three hundred pages—with charming courtesy. Moreover, he really enjoyed disputations, as we know, and the anxieties of Metaxata were soothed by these debates. It might seem that, on the whole, Byron showed more kindness than the doctor's personality demanded. The unknown writer in *Medora Leigh* met Kennedy (and his "beautiful young wife"), and found him a "very weak person in mind and body, ignorant of the most common controversial arguments even on his own side." Gamba confines himself to saying that he was "rather methodistically inclined," and that the disputes sometimes lasted five or six hours. Kennedy himself was uncertain as to how far his influence had prevailed. He finally contented himself by giving tracts to Byron, who reported that he had handed them on to Fletcher.

In the midst of these amiable distractions, Byron was becoming daily more fixed in the new motive of his life. "If Greece should fall, I will bury myself in its ruins," he told Gamba, and he meant it. "If she should establish her independence," he added, "I will take up my residence in some part or other—perhaps in Attica." Dreams were on the horizon. Already there had been suggestions that in the regenerated Greece he might be king. A curious speculation this, if we consider European history since 1823. Through November and December a confusion of conflicting reports came in to Metaxata, plans were made and abandoned, and hopes rose and fell. Slowly the horizon cleared, and at last it was decided that Byron's presence at Missolonghi was the need of the hour. On December 28th the party sailed from Argostoli, and at daybreak on the 30th they found themselves by the shallows that lie out from the little town that was to be famous from that day.

2

The political ramifications of the Greek War of Independence are not within the design of this book, and we need to make but the barest reference to the military events of which, as it turned out, Byron was but a spectator on the verge of action. Mr. Edgcumbe in *Byron: The Last Phase*, and Mr. Nicolson in *Byron: The Last Journey*, have, by their widely different methods, examined the sources of our information in these matters very thoroughly. Mr. Nicolson has shown what engaging life may be evoked from the dry bones of forgotten politics by clear vision and a light touch. But our own purpose is to select such moments from the expansive records of Missolonghi as will complete the narrative in which we have endeavoured to present a character. The rival claims of Mavrocordato and Odysseus, the destinies of the Greek loan in England, the operations of the Greek and Turkish fleets, the strategy of the battle of Lepanto, the chicanery of all parties and all ranks in all parties in and out of Missolonghi—such things call for but a few words to show the impact that they made on Byron. In his efforts to raise and his readiness to lend money he was unfailing. He made no professions of military knowledge, and urged the appointment of some such man as Napier to the command if he could be secured; but he was poignantly anxious to prove himself in the field, he realised that he might inspire the Greeks as a leader in action, and it would be difficult to exaggerate his influence in keeping some sort of order among the contending factions. In dealing with the disputes that distracted the Greek counsels it is clear that he showed admirable courage and firmness. He arrived in Greece with great prestige, and he kept it. All the indications are that if he had lived he would have added to it indefinitely. The deliberation with which he approached the problems before him, Trelawny took to be indolence; it was, in fact, the careful rhythm of a real statesmanship that was quite beyond Trelawny's intelligence. Byron had to find a sound foothold in a labyrinth of quicksands, and anything but caution would have been a grave neglect of responsibility. By the time he had been a

few weeks at Missolonghi he had found it, and when he died there was already evidence that he was realising the necessity of swift execution no less opportunely than he had done that of guarded preparation. As to the discords in their own camp, it is greatly to Byron's credit that he kept these always in right perspective. Some Greeks might be shifty and enraging, but the Greek people were fighting and dying heroically in the best of all causes. Byron knew too much of history and of humanity to discredit a national consecration because of a few shameful misdemeanours.

One important circumstance we must bear in mind. Byron's service and death in Greece have become one of the romances of history. Not only did he make a fine end, but now all the world knows that he made a fine end. And it is sometimes suggested that nothing but the appetite for such celebrity induced him to go to Greece at all. This view is a gross injustice to Byron's character, confusing his superficial vanity with his essential greatness. The conflict between these ravaged his life, as it has been the purpose of this book to show; but enough should have been said by now to make it easy to distinguish the one from the other. The view, further, wilfully disregards facts. Byron at Missolonghi was by no means to the world in 1823 what he has become to history. For generations his Greek adventure has been the theme of innumerable tongues. But in 1823 it attracted very insignificant attention. Prestige among the Greeks themselves could have meant but little to him, and for the world at large only a few enthusiasts and the committee in London gave two thoughts to this obscure eddy in European affairs, or cared who was or was not at Missolonghi. Byron's death transformed the adventure at once into a sacrifice; but then he was a safe candidate in any case for ample obituary notices, though the manner of his end doubtless modified their tone. But Byron did not go to Greece for the purpose of dying. He knew the risks, and he may have had presentiments, but he went for the purpose of liberating an enslaved people, and no ingenuity of malice can alter the plain fact. He went, moreover, with a total indifference to his personal comforts and interests. The issue of the struggle was very un-

certain, and he was at least as likely to beggar as to aggrandise himself in its support. And, if *réclame* was all he wanted, it was perfectly easy for him to achieve it by distributing his money and his influence from the security of Cephalonia. The Greeks and the London committee could hardly have complained that he was not doing enough when he would still have been doing so much more than any one else, and for such of the world's gossip as was interested at all Argostoli or Metaxata would certainly sound as well as Missolonghi. But he chose to place himself in the midst of a hundred dangers, from a merciless enemy that was being roused to fury, from treachery, and from the poisons that drifted up continually from a belt of festering lagoons, and not all his friends could persuade him to leave them.

The heroism of his heart in these days found for itself, indeed, but little of heroic circumstance. His landing at Missolonghi, delayed with many consequent fatigues by the attentions of a Turkish frigate, was, it is true, sufficiently spectacular. In a borrowed red uniform, says Gamba, he stepped ashore "to salvos of artillery, firing from muskets, and wild music. Crowds of soldiery, and citizens of every rank, sex, and age, were assembled on the shore to testify their delight." Colonel Stanhope, another commissioner from London, with a long suite of European officers, and Prince Mavrocordato, at the head of his Greek staff, received the deliverer in front of the house that had been prepared for him. This was an auspicious beginning, but Byron had scarcely had time to wash when a dozen deputations lined up at, or rather scrambled through his door. The yard outside was filled with the brawling attendants of primates, chiefs, and petitioners of all kinds who clamoured for a hearing. The navy was threatening desertion if arrears of pay were not forthcoming, the army was following suit. Would Byron pay them? Yes. Would he please teach that ruffian on the other side of the room to keep his proper place? No, he would not. He would teach them all that they had one common object, and that nothing else mattered; and would they mind calling at a more convenient time? But they found all times convenient, and within a day or two it became clear that whatever might happen to the Turks a civil strife

among the Greeks themselves was to be settled, or not settled, in the yard, on the doorstep, the landings, the stairs, and in the rooms of Byron's house. The red uniform was certainly proving to be no carnival dress.

The house itself, no longer standing, but admirably reconstructed by Mr. Nicolson after a visit to the site under the guidance of Mr. Aramandios Soustas, the head master of the Missolonghi School, was of some size but had nothing else to recommend it. The ground-floor was occupied as a barracks for the Suliots; the first floor by Stanhope and his printing press; the top floor by Byron with his servants. Gamba had his quarters elsewhere. "Mesolonghi," says Julius Millingen, an unsavoury but rather humorous young doctor [1] who joined the Greeks at this time and was in attendance on Byron during his last illness, "consisted of about eight hundred scattered houses, built close to the sea-side, on a marshy and most unhealthy site scarcely above the level of the waters, which, a few centuries ago, must have covered the spot, as may be judged from the nature of the soil, consisting of decomposed sea-weeds and dried mud." Sanitation there was none. Byron from his windows looked out on endless vistas of mud flats, frog-infested marshes, and stagnant pools. Fever was proverbially as much a condition of citizenship as fishing for the red mullet for which the coast is famous. In 1823 the town, says Millingen, was "enjoying its halcyon days." That is to say, some of the worst scoundrels of the near Levant were conducting nightly orgies in the streets and gimcrack bazaars, to the disturbance of everybody's peace. Let a sailor fall out with a customs official on a matter of twopence, and musket-shots rang out above a torrent of oaths by day or night. The local magistracy could brawl as roundly as any malcontents of them all when put to it. Not but what the genuine ardour that was gathered in the town could match itself against this blackguardism. "The martial pyrrhic dance, accompanied by songs celebrating late exploits, animated the soldier to fresh deeds of glory." But what with orgies, and pyrrhic dance and song, and

[1] He was appointed Surgeon-in-Chief to the army of Western Greece; at two pounds a month. He found that his stipend was rarely paid, and went over to the Turks.

Stanhope's press downstairs, there was a devil of a noise going on.

Through most of January 1824 it rained and rained and rained, splashing the tideless lagoons into sullen movement. Everything seemed to be mud, the flat wastes, the houses, the sky, the air. The roads, such as they were, became impassable, and Byron could not even take his rides. When the weather cleared for an hour, all he could do for exercise was to paddle about the slime in a canoe, to the *obbligato* of a million croaking frogs. Bugs were a commonplace of existence. Squalor crept into every corner of the premises, festooning the walls with damp-stains, making Tita's beard an encumbrance. Fletcher was confirmed in his opinion; his master was undoubtedly mad.

But Byron stuck to it magnificently. He was going to be master of this job, or destroy himself in the effort. Plans for the spring campaign slowly shaped themselves through all the mists of contention. He agreed to take five hundred Suliots under his own command, and at his own expense. On fine days they manœuvred out on the plain to his orders, and very impressive they were. Hard, wiry, athletic men, Byron knew that they were the material for those days in the spring when he would show them what a leader could be. But, in the meantime, when there was no review on, they led their leader a very distracting dance, much as they genuinely liked and respected him. Also Byron raised a special artillery corps of fifty men with Stanhope, with whom he shared the charges. Stanhope, however, was not altogether a satisfactory colleague. He, like nearly everyone else concerned in them, has also left his record of those epic days. Stanhope wanted to educate the Greeks, and he knew that a free press was the first essential of education, and so he printed a newspaper, two newspapers, on the first floor. Byron was sceptical about this. He thought the Greek should make himself free first, and then be educated. However, he paid for Stanhope's newspapers.[1] Then he questioned the editorial policy; he thought that Stanhope was too provocative for so combustible a

[1] *The Greek Chronicle* and *The Greek Telegraph.*

state of society; but Stanhope stood firmly for his free press, and Byron made jokes about him behind his back. He even advocated a censorship, whereupon Stanhope threatened to report this infringement of privilege to the committee in London. To which Byron retorted with more jokes, but he quietly deputed a small bodyguard to look after the printing office. Further, Stanhope was displeased because Byron, upstairs, would sit up late at nights and talk. He was sometimes inclined to agree with Fletcher: people ought to talk in the day and go to sleep at night. Finally, there was an explosive scene when Byron accused his fellow commissioner of being high-handed about certain demands made by the British Government, reasonably as Byron thought. When they parted, Stanhope held a light on the stairs to guide Byron up to his room, and was rallied with "What! hold up a light to a Turk!" which was really fooling with serious things. It must, however, be said that Stanhope, in the *Sketch of Lord Byron*, which he added to the second edition of his *Greece in* 1823 *and* 1824, is very charmingly generous about a man whom he did not begin to understand. He had far more reason than either Leigh Hunt or Trelawny to dislike Byron, and he taught them both how a gentleman should behave to the opposition. He left Missolonghi for Athens towards the end of February, and allied himself to Odysseus.

These nocturnal conversations of which Stanhope complained were for a time joined by George Finlay, afterwards the historian of Greece. During March he was at Missolonghi with Byron, whom he, like Dr. Kennedy, reminded of Shelley. Finlay says that Byron "talked much of his youthful scenes at Cambridge, Brighton, and London," much of Hobhouse and Scrope Davies, much of Newstead, even of Aberdeen—continually, in fact, of the past.

January 22nd was Byron's birthday, and on joining his friends in the morning he produced, says Gamba, "those noble and affecting verses . . . which were afterwards found written in his journal, with only the following introduction: *January* 22: *on this day I complete my thirty-sixth year.*"

'Tis time this heart should be unmoved,
Since others it has ceased to move;
Yet, though I cannot be beloved,
Still let me love!

My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruit of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone.

So they began. No boudoir posy this, if we call up the scene before us. Every one bears testimony to Byron's high spirits in those grim and difficult days. But in the early hours of the morning, when Stanhope was peacefully asleep underneath, a tragic, almost terrifying panorama would drift across that yet unanchored mind. And there, outside the window, it was still raining. Lepanto—Mavrocordato—Suliots—Liberty—and then a flash of the old creative eagerness, and, "My days are in the yellow leaf."

After breakfast, soda-water and a biscuit, back from lyric poetry to this odd campaign of wrangling and freedom. Back indeed from lyric and all poetry for ever. Plans were going forward certainly, but the confusion from which they had to emerge did not cease. Dr. Kennedy, anxious to know how Byron was faring, asked a friend who visited Missolonghi at the time to send him news. One passage of the consequent letter is strangely reminiscent, or prophetic, of 1914. "The household appeared in confusion: all the servants had uniforms, each according to his fancy, and some of them were of the most grotesque kind: they seemed to have exchanged duties . . . each appeared to be doing something else than that which lay within his province." On February 5th, William Parry arrived from London, appointed by the committee to take charge of the artillery and especially recommended for his knowledge of Greek fire. He had been a firemaster in the Royal Navy, and through the Ordnance Works at Woolwich. Byron took a fancy to him and made him a major, greatly to the disgust of every other officer in Missolonghi, who asserted that he was only a shipwright, and

no gentleman. Parry did know more about artillery than most of the people there, who knew nothing, and he may have known about Greek fire; but, as none of the necessary ingredients had been provided, he was unable to demonstrate his skill. Which was lamentable, because Greek fire was just the one thing that everybody wanted. Parry's failure to produce it had disastrous results. It may almost be said to have been the immediate cause of Byron's death. Parry, needless to say, wrote a book, *The Last Days of Lord Byron* (1825).

3

The first demonstration from Missolonghi was now on foot. Lepanto was its objective. Intelligence work had been good, and judicious bribery had prepared the way for an easy conquest. The Suliots were to put the issue beyond doubt as crack troops under Byron himself. But the Suliots were proving to be incorrigible people. One characteristic exploit may be reported of them. A Swedish lieutenant who was on duty at the military laboratory challenged one of their number who had entered without authority, and ordered him to leave. "On his refusal, the officer drew his sword," says Millingen, "and struck him with its flat edge. Incensed at this, the Suliot . . . cut the Swede's left arm almost entirely off with one stroke of his yataghan; and, immediately after, shot him through the head." After a struggle the murderer was arrested, but the Suliots in a body demanded and obtained his release under threats of general violence. The next day the Swede was buried with military honours, and the Suliots were considered to have made due atonement by attending the funeral. When the moment for advancing upon Lepanto arrived, they showed the stuff they were made of. They demanded more pay, and proposed that about twenty-five per cent. of them should be given commissioned rank. Were they not being asked to attack a garrison containing some of their own countrymen? No; the Albanians at Lepanto were to be spirited back into their mountains. Then were they not being asked to throw themselves against stone walls? They would find the walls yielding,

and in any case war was war. But the demands for more pay had to be justified somehow—so where was Major Parry's Greek fire? They had been promised Greek fire, and if they were not to have it, plainly they were entitled to more pay. At this point Byron's patience broke down. He had liked these primitive, hardy hillsmen, he had pledged his word for them, he had kept them on terms that they had never known in their lives, out of his own pocket. And now, with a brilliant success ready to his hand at Lepanto, they were letting him down. And still it was raining, and he could not ride. Everybody in the world seemed to be a Suliot, or at least nobody seemed able to talk of anything but dollars or piastres.

Suddenly the taut string snapped. On February 15th Gamba went into Byron's room to transact some business, and found him lying on the sofa in distress. He seemed to recover, and went downstairs to discuss the ethics of journalism with Stanhope. Gamba left him so occupied, "joking with Parry and the Colonel," and drinking cider; but he had hardly gone out of the room when Byron was in convulsions, Parry and Tita having to exercise all their strength to hold him down. This was late in the evening. The fit subsided, and the next day at noon he was up again. He was dreadfully weak, with "a sensation of weight in his head." The doctors applied leeches, and he fainted. He fought gallantly against the tide, resumed his authority, and tried as he had always done to show both Greeks and Turks that courage and chivalry were good camp-fellows, laughed about that silly fit to keep his own friends in mettle, and began to take his rides again. But he was a dying man; Bruno and Millingen knew it, Fletcher knew it, Stanhope, Mavrocordato, Tita—they all knew it, and he knew it himself. He was implored to leave Missolonghi, to go to Cephalonia, Athens, anywhere to give himself a chance. He replied that he had not come to Greece for tranquillity, and that, if he was to be of any use, he must be where he could observe things for himself. On February 22nd he had another slight attack, but it passed at once. Kennedy had received the alarming news, and wrote to Bruno asking whether outside consultation would be helpful. New expeditions were

planned, fortifications inspected, diplomatic negotiations conducted. But pains and vertigo interfered with everything. In March was a scare of plague, and through the middle of the month it rained as it had never rained before. Confined to the house, Byron and Gamba practised with the foils, and still despatches flowed in from every interest in Greece. There seemed, however, to be some hope of harmony at last; from all quarters proposals were made that Byron should be mediator in the general ferment of dispute, and take his place as the leader of a united Greece. The news of the English loan was good.

By the end of March Missolonghi was waterlogged. Byron was given the freedom of the town, and at once found himself saddled with a dozen new responsibilities to his fellow-citizens. The early days of April were spent in dealing with fresh menaces from the Suliots, who had now been seduced by one of the disaffected chieftains. Byron kept his head as usual, and with a break in the weather he rode out again, eager for exercise and glad to reassure the people that he was still very actively among them. On April 9th, when he was with Gamba three or four miles from the town, they were caught in a deluge, and arrived at the house "wet through and in a violent perspiration." Two hours later he was ill again, but the danger of a new attack seemed to pass. The next morning he took another ride, his groom disgracefully giving him the wet saddle that he had used on the previous evening. He began to show signs of fever, complaining of shooting pains and shuddering fits. For a few days Bruno was not alarmed, but on the 15th Byron asked for Millingen to be called in for consultation. Before seeing what the doctors did, we may pause for a moment to glance at Byron's establishment as it was in these last days of his life.

Of the natural squalor of the apartments we have spoken; we will consider the occupants. Byron, obviously very ill, spending much of his time on his low narrow bed heavily hung with verminous curtains, moves as often as his strength will allow him to deal with the confusion of papers lying on his table. In attendance are Fletcher, the one link with his past life, but scared at this lamentable issue of his master's folly, and a little out of

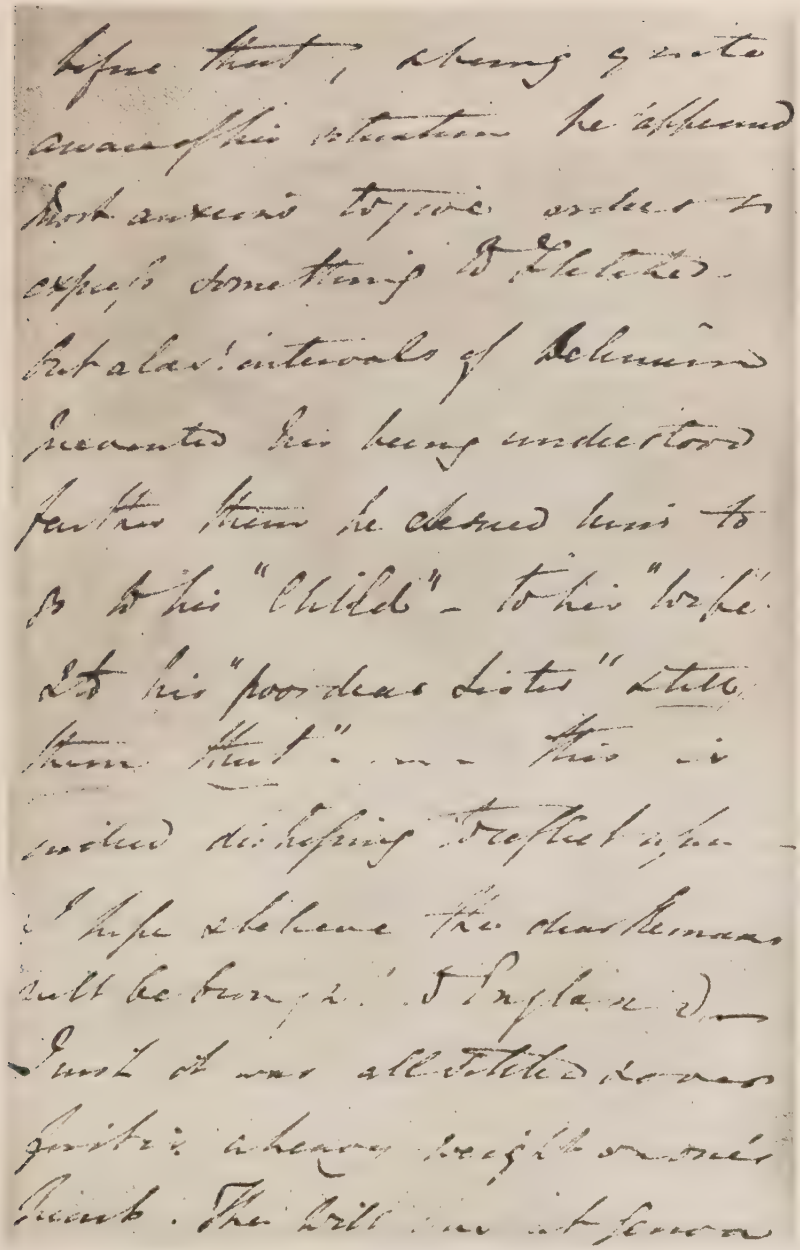
favour, what with all his reproaches and alarms; then Tita, twenty-six years old, huge and dog-like, dealing with the situation quietly and competently, rather taking the shine out of Fletcher; and Dr. Bruno, also scared, desperately aware of his responsibility, desperately anxious to do the right thing, not without ability, but hardly more than a medical student, and utterly inexperienced. Fletcher speaks English and a little bad Italian, Bruno Italian and a little bad English, Tita Italian only. Millingen, twenty-four, positive, self-important, with hardly better qualifications than Bruno, condescends as the consultant. A Greek boy, Luca, whom Byron had taken into his service, waits on everybody's orders; and Lion, the Newfoundland, lies at the door at the top of the stairs waiting to take charge of his master when he goes to see those very undesirable people in the barracks below. Pietro Gamba, several years junior to Byron, comes in regularly, limping from a strained ankle that has kept him away for a day after the collapse of the 15th. Rather a charming, spirited young man, with a good head and good manners, Byron scolded him for extravagance, but liked him, and could treat him as a younger brother, which in a sense he was. Byron may also very well have been touched by his young friend's solicitude; Gamba was always anxious about Byron's ardours in Missolonghi, fearing that they would tempt him to throw his life away in some rash enterprise. Another constant visitor, however, did not like Count Gamba, and looked upon him with suspicion. But then Major Parry disliked all Byron's familiars, and looked upon them with suspicion. Parry was an industrious, well-meaning, not incapable fellow, between fifty and sixty years of age; but Byron's marked preference for him had gone to his head, and now he was greatly upset that his duties at the laboratory should keep him from his lordship's bedside. His distress was due first to genuine attachment and gratitude, and secondly to his conviction that he knew far better than anyone else what ought to be done. What Byron really wanted was "to return to the habits of an English gentleman, as to his diet," which, as Parry saw it, chiefly meant more brandy. When he called, therefore, he rated Millingen soundly, treated Bruno with elaborate con-

tempt, and let Gamba see that it was really Major Parry who was Lord Byron's confidential friend. The confusion of tongues, the lack of nearly all the luxuries and many of the necessities of a sick-room, differences of opinion between the servants and between the doctors, completed the oppression of damp, dirt, and unwholesome atmosphere. On one point only was there general agreement among Byron's attendants: when Parry was heard coming upstairs any expedient was lawful to keep him out. But Byron was too sharp for them, and so the major came and went as he pleased, very cordially disliked by everybody but Byron himself, who valued a certain sturdiness in his favourite not too easily to be found in Missolonghi. And Parry made his reckoning in his book by giving a just and striking appreciation of Byron and calculated libels on everyone else.

Bruno and Millingen disagreed as to diagnosis and treatment, but with great difficulty they together persuaded Byron to allow himself to be bled. He resisted strenuously, even pathetically, but at length, calling them a damned set of butchers, yielded. The improvement was less marked than they had expected; in fact, there was no improvement at all. Cold compresses, blisters, leeches also failed to give any decided relief. Now really frightened, the distracted young men, on April 18th, called in two other doctors. Typhus was one opinion, acute rheumatic inflammation another; a later suggestion, communicated to Mr. Nicolson, is pernicious malaria. Whether responsible medical treatment could have saved Byron is, in view of the autopsy that was afterwards made, extremely doubtful; but that he did not have a fair chance is clear. Bruno and Millingen later fell to blaming each other, but, while we may think the less of them for this, it is unreasonable to charge either of them with Byron's death. The case was beyond them; it might have been beyond the best advice in Europe. Nothing more can be made of it than that.

After the fourfold consultation, the decision rested with Bruno as Byron's official physician, and he administered an "antispasmodic potion . . . a strong infusion of valerian with ether." The convulsions and delirium increased, but, says Millingen, a second dose was administered half an hour after in spite of his earnest protests. Byron then called Fletcher, and, taking his

PLATE XII



FACSIMILE OF AUGUSTA LEIGH'S LETTER TO HODGSON, CONTAINING A REPORT OF BYRON'S LAST WORDS

hand, said, "You will be provided for—now hear my last wishes." Fletcher, Gamba tells us, asked to be allowed to get pen and paper that he might make no mistake. "No," was the reply, "there is no time—mind you execute my orders. Go to my sister —tell her—go to Lady Byron—you will see her, and say——" For twenty minutes he muttered incoherently, the watchers catching nothing but the names, Augusta, Ada, Hobhouse, Kinnaird. "Now I have told you all"—but Fletcher, terrified and his wits all astray, answered, "My lord, I have not understood a word your lordship has been saying." Byron, in acute agitation, mumbled a few more words—"my sister, my child," these were all that were intelligible.

Several versions of Byron's words to Fletcher have reached us, and it is impossible to say certainly which, if any, is precisely correct. There is, however, no essential difference between them, and we may take Gamba's account, followed above, as a faithful one. After the end Fletcher wrote to Augusta telling her of everything as truthfully as he could, and Augusta sent a long letter at once to Hodgson, dated May 31st, in which we are told that Fletcher reports Byron as desiring him "to go to 'his child,' to his 'wife,' and to his 'poor dear sister,' and *tell them that. . . .*" Fletcher's letter itself was privately printed in 1920 by Mr. H. C. Roe; a facsimile of a page of Augusta's letter to Hodgson is here given.

The scene with Fletcher took place about four o'clock on the afternoon of the 18th. Byron then slept, to wake again in half an hour. Parry went to the bedside, and Byron tried again to speak, and again a few fragmentary phrases—even more fragmentary we suspect than they became in Gamba's recollection—were all that he could mutter. At six o'clock he said, "I want to go to sleep now," and fell once more into a heavy slumber. For twenty-four hours they watched him, sometimes lifting his head in an effort to relieve the symptoms of suffocation. The sleep became a profound lethargy. At a quarter past six the next evening, April 19th, he opened his eyes, immediately to close them again. He was dead. And, almost at the moment, one of the "most awful thunderstorms" that Parry had ever witnessed broke over Missolonghi.

Chapter VII

EPILOGUE

"But, as all violence must in time have its proportionate reaction, you will do better by and bye."

—Byron to John Murray.

1

ALL personal animosities were now suspended in the shock of this common grief. Nothing that malice or cynicism has been able to say or invent about Byron in a hundred years can diminish the human testimony of that sorrow. "To me he was a kind friend," says Parry, "as well as a most instructive companion. Knowing him was for me a source of satisfaction unmingled with one regret." Millingen speaks of the many kindnesses he had personally received from Byron, adding, "every one looked upon him as a father and public benefactor." Bruno, careless for the moment of the effect that the tragedy might have on his own reputation, was heartbroken, went with Byron's body to England, attended the funeral, and, says Mr. Nicolson, "refused to accept from the executors any fee for his services." Tita told Hoppner that he had lost a father rather than a master, and Fletcher, in a like strain, wrote to Murray: "I Scearseley Now what I either Say or Do for after 20 years Service To My Lord he was More to me than a father and I am too much Distressed to now Give a Correct accompt of every Pertickeler." Gamba, after the catastrophe, spoke for the household when he said, "It was in vain that, when we met, we tried to keep up our spirits—our attempts at consolation always ended in mutual tears." Parry, Millingen, and Gamba agree in describing the effect of the news in Missolonghi as overwhelming. The sense of public loss, amounting almost to panic, was reinforced by an intense personal emotion throughout the town. An official proclamation, dated April 19th,

decrees that on the morrow "thirty-seven minute-guns will be fired from the Grand Battery, being the number which corresponds with the age of the illustrious deceased," that "all the public offices, even the tribunals, are to remain closed for three successive days," that all shops, other than provision and medicine stores, are to be shut, that all Easter festivities be cancelled, that general mourning be observed for twenty-one days, and that "Prayers and a funeral service are to be offered up in all churches."

At dawn on April 20th the minute-guns were fired, and "one of the batteries of the corps under his orders also fired one gun every half-hour for the succeeding four-and-twenty hours." On the 21st, Gamba continues, "a silence, like that of the grave, prevailed over the whole city." The funeral ceremony, intended for this day, had to be put off because of the rain. On the 22nd, escorted by his own brigade, whose officers acted as bearers, the rest of the troops, and the entire population, Byron's body was borne to church in an ill-constructed chest of wood; "a black mantle served for a pall; and over it we placed a helmet and a sword; and a crown of laurel." There it remained in state, passed by a continuous stream of mourners, until the evening of the 23rd, when it was "privately carried back by his officers to his own house."

Millingen asserts plainly that Byron said, "One request let me make to you. Let not my body . . . be sent to England. . . . Lay me in the first corner without pomp or nonsense." And Parry, as plainly, that he said, "if I should die in Greece, and you survive me, do you see that my body is sent to England." Whatever the truth of this may have been, the wishes of the Greeks that he should be buried at Athens were overruled, and to England he was taken, on the brig *Florida*, with Stanhope, Bruno and Fletcher on board, Gamba travelling independently. They reached London on July 2nd. But in the meantime the news had arrived in England on May 14th, with historic consequences. Byron's friends and adversaries alike were conscious of something almost cataclysmic having happened. The press that had attacked him without restraint or scruple was awed into some sort

of decency. Thousands of readers, for days, found themselves strangely shaken, as did Alfred Tennyson, then aged fifteen, when he went out to scrawl with a stick on his Lincolnshire sands, "Byron is dead." Opinions might be violently divided as to whether he was a great poet, but nobody could remember anything like this public sensation being caused by the death of a poet at all. It might be a national calamity or a national blessing, but in any case it was national. And national, or international, Byron has remained ever since. When reasoned criticism has allowed him what rank it will, it has also to allow that, taking all things into consideration, variety of readers, caprices of fashion, and extent of appeal both as to classes and nationalities, Byron is, next to Shakespeare, the most famous English poet. These things do not happen without adequate reasons; what the reasons have been for Byron's obstinate reputation this study has hoped to discover. And the solution in a word may be that, while as a man and as a poet Byron was below many great examples in transfiguring discipline, he is inferior to none in energy, and that energy has always, for good or bad, been a wonder of the world.

2

Among Byron's own friends at home, Hobhouse, Moore, Murray, Kinnaird, Rogers perhaps and Hanson, a little company, indeed, but a faithful, the news of his death produced consternation. Augusta knew that something incalculable had happened to her life; the Guiccioli in Bologna felt that an irreparable disaster had befallen hers. Lady Byron's emotions stirred for a moment, and were withdrawn into an inscrutable retirement. In July 1825 *The Observer* said: "Lady Byron has got a pleasure yacht on the coast of Kent in which she lives almost entirely at sea, and sails between the French and English shores. She is accompanied by her daughter and some females of her own family. When she lands she avoids the larger towns and secludes herself in the smaller villages." But, whatever personal feelings might be aroused by the tidings, one matter of business

had to be attended to, and at once. In Murray's possession was the manuscript of the memoirs given by Byron to Moore. What was to be done with it? The answer became a literary scandal, to which a moment's attention must be paid.

To lament the loss of Byron's own account of his life is natural, though my own impression is that, good reading as it inevitably would have been, we should have found in it no essential enlargement of our knowledge. Contemporary rumour supports this surmise, but surmise it remains. The facts, as we know them, very briefly are as follows.

In the first place, it must be observed that the gift of the memoirs to Moore, providing that they were not to be published during Byron's lifetime, was unconditional. Moore was to dispose of them how and on what terms he liked, and if he survived Byron was to be free to publish them in any form he thought fit. Moore sold the manuscript to Murray in 1821 for two thousand guineas. A remonstrance from Hobhouse drew this rejoinder from Byron: "With regard to the Memoirs I can only say that Moore acted entirely with my approbation in the whole transaction"; and again, "there is nothing discreditable to Moore in selling the Memoirs for he did it at my suggestion." To Murray also Byron twice wrote confirming this unconditional gift. Moore's bargain provided that he should have the option of redeeming the manuscript by repayment of the purchase money at any time up to Byron's death, for a period of three months after which event Murray would otherwise be free to publish them, Moore to be engaged as editor. Moore became confused in his mind about these condition, but his good faith in the first stages of the transaction is beyond question. Byron asked Lady Byron if she wished to read the manuscript; she declined, but objected in general terms to its publication. Lord John Russell, Gifford, and Washington Irving are reported, among others, to have read the manuscript, and to have felt that publication, of some passages at least, was undesirable on account of grossness, but there is no suggestion of sensational exposures. That the memoirs would, however, have made uncomfortable reading for several persons there is no doubt, and immediately it was

known that Byron was dead, steps were taken for their destruction. What these steps were we learn in great detail from an account drawn up at the time by Hobhouse, privately printed in 1870 in the same volume with his statement on the separation, and published in *Recollections of a Long Life* (1910).

On May 14th, within a few hours of hearing the news from Greece, Hobhouse and Kinnaird were in consultation as to how the manuscript could be secured. Moore, it seems, had at an earlier date approached Murray with a view to cancelling an agreement about which he had qualms. Suspecting that he might have some difficulty in finding the redemption money, Hobhouse and Kinnaird decided to offer to supply this on condition that the manuscript should at once be placed at the absolute disposal of Byron's family, that is to say of Mrs. Leigh. This proposal was then made to Moore. On the next day, however, they heard from Murray that the manuscript was still in his hands, and that he proposed to offer it to the family. At the same moment, Moore, who had been financed by Longman for the purpose, announced that he himself was prepared to recover it under what he said was a condition of the contract. And he would then hand it over to Mrs. Leigh. Both he and Murray professed disinterested regard for the wishes of Byron's family, and there is no reason to doubt their sincerity. Whether the loser, whichever he might be, would be reimbursed by the estate was another matter. Both were prepared to take the risk.

Hobhouse took Moore's offer to Murray, and it was accepted. An appointment was made for noon on the 17th at Mrs. Leigh's house, when Moore was to hand over the money to Murray, and the manuscript was to be delivered to Mrs. Leigh, represented by Wilmot Horton. Colonel Doyle, a friend of Lady Byron, was also to be present. Early on the morning of that day, however, Hobhouse received a letter from Moore saying that he had changed his mind, and was going to Albemarle Street at eleven o'clock to redeem the manuscript. Alarmed at this intelligence, Hobhouse left home, and met Moore in the street. After some expostulations they returned to Hobhouse's, where they found Murray. A fourth person, Henry Luttrell, joined them, and Moore

explained that his idea now was that extracts should be made from the manuscript for publication. "On hearing this Mr. Murray expressed himself warmly; he sat down, and in a very determined voice and manner protested that the MSS. should be burnt forthwith, according to Mr. Moore's own proposal for handing it over to Mrs. Leigh, who, it was known, had resolved to destroy the papers at once, without perusal."

Moore pointed out that the manuscript was his, and that he now had the "right and power" to ask for its return. To which Murray majestically replied, "I do not care whose the MSS. are; here am I, as a tradesman; I do not care a farthing about having your money, or whether I ever get it or not; but such a regard have I for Lord Byron's fame and honour, that I am willing and determined to destroy those MSS. which have been read by Mr. Gifford, who says they would be damaging to Lord Byron's name. It is very hard that I, as a tradesman, should be willing to make a sacrifice which you, as a gentleman, will not consent to." Moore was about to offer some observations, when "Mr. Murray rose and said, in a vehement tone, 'Then, by God, I say I will burn the papers, let what will come of it. You agreed to it; you proposed it; you have acted anything but like a man of honour.'" To which "Mr. Moore said: 'Go on, sir, you know you may say what you like.'"

Luttrell here interposed with the remark that at least there could be no harm in reading the manuscript, which oddly enough no one present, not excepting Moore, seems to have done. Hobhouse objected. Moore said that Horton and Doyle agreed to this course; Hobhouse said he doubted it; Murray said that these gentlemen were at that moment waiting at his house; whereupon the entire party moved on to Albemarle Street.

Horton and Doyle said that Moore, in seeking their approval of his present wishes, had not disclosed to them his original offer to redeem the manuscript from Murray through Hobhouse in Mrs. Leigh's favour. They now considered that he should abide by that, which in the circumstances meant that they considered that the manuscript should be destroyed. Moore and Hobhouse proceeded to an altercation as to what Byron's own wishes would

have been. At this point the famous manuscript itself was brought into the room. Hobhouse then proposed an adjournment of the meeting to Mrs. Leigh's house, in accordance with the original intention; but Wilmot said that this was not necessary, as he was fully empowered to act on Mrs. Leigh's behalf—empowered, that is, to see the manuscript destroyed. Moore continued to protest, and Hobhouse to tell him that he had no right to protest. Finally Doyle, who seems to have been acting in some way jointly for Lady Byron and Augusta, put the leading question to Moore whether he stood by his "original proposal to put the MSS. at Mrs. Leigh's absolute disposal." Moore replied, "I do, but with the former protestations." Whereupon Doyle said, without further discussion, "on the part of Mrs. Leigh I put them into the fire," which he and Wilmot, having torn the papers up, forthwith did.

They then proceeded to the business of the repayment of the loan. Murray, on going to fetch the agreement, could not find it. Then a rough draft was produced, but nothing appeared in it about Moore's right to repurchase. Then the agreement itself was brought in, and a strange discovery was made. Moore, quite honestly no doubt, had been seriously mistaken in his memory as to its terms. His recollection was that he had the option of repayment at any time up to three months after Byron's death. It now turned out that in fact the option had expired at the date of death itself, so that all this commotion had been about a manuscript that was now Murray's absolute property. Had this been known, the assumption clearly was that Murray would have destroyed it at his own loss. But Moore had Longman's two thousand guineas in his pocket, and, after much further discussion as to the ethics of the matter, in which at times everybody was speaking at once, the money was paid to Murray and the meeting broke up. Setting aside the morality of destroying the manuscript at all, it does not appear that any one in this somewhat tragi-farcical interlude behaved very reprehensibly; but least of all is there anything to the discredit of Moore beyond a stupid lapse of memory that cost him two thousand guineas. Supposing as he did that he had a status that in fact he had not,

we may think that he should have taken a firmer stand; but he had Hobhouse, Kinnaird, Doyle, Horton, and Murray uncompromisingly against him, and the very decided wishes of Augusta, not to mention Lady Byron. He might well think that his duty to Byron was best discharged by submitting to the views of so many people who could reasonably enough claim to have Byron's interests at heart as sincerely as he had himself. He put his case forcibly and tenaciously, and was at length overruled by counsels that at least seemed to be above suspicion. On the whole, it is clear, the legend of Moore's abject destruction of Byron's memoirs bears no examination.

3

Lady Byron was asked, through Augusta, whether she had any wishes to express with regard to the funeral. She had none. The *Florida* was boarded by Hobhouse at Standgate Creek on July 1st. Fletcher sobbed as he told the story of Missolonghi as coherently as he could, while three of Byron's dogs played about the deck. Fletcher and Stanhope, supported by a letter from Kennedy, were reassuring about Byron's state of grace at the end, "And yet," says Hobhouse, "I find seventeen stanzas of a new canto of *Don Juan* among his papers." Stanhope at least was clear that the two friends that Byron liked best in the world were Lord Clare and Hobhouse himself—not, it was comforting to know, T. Moore.

They anchored at Gravesend on the 2nd, and Hobhouse went back to London. Three days later he and Hanson proved Byron's will, and then he returned to the *Florida*, to find the undertaker at work. The body was taken on to a barge, which moved quietly up the river to Palace Yard stairs, the shore being crowded with spectators. "Thence," says Hobhouse, "the coffin and the small chest containing the heart were carried to the house in George Street, and deposited in the room prepared for their reception. The room was decently hung with black, but there was no other decoration than an escutcheon of the Byron arms, roughly daubed on a deal board."

The house in Great George Street, Westminster, belonged to Sir Edward Knatchbull, and there the body lay in state from July the 5th to the 12th, immense crowds, we are told, applying for admittance. On the 5th Augusta wrote to Hodgson, from her rooms at St. James's Palace, that it was undecided whether the burial was to be in Westminster Abbey or the family vault at Hucknall Torkard; on the 8th a further letter announced that Hucknall Torkard was to be the place. The authorities at the Abbey refused to receive Byron's body, as they have ever since refused to admit any memorial to him—so inflexible is righteousness. On the 12th the house in George Street was a centre of activity and curiosity from the early hours of the morning. Hobhouse was there from eight o'clock, superintending the undertaker and his assistants. Shortly after half-past nine Moore arrived with Rogers. "When I approached the house," he says in his Diary, "and saw the crowd assembled, felt a nervous trembling come over me; thought I should be ill. . . . The riotous curiosity of the mob, the bustle of the undertakers, etc., mixing with my recollections of him who was gone, produced a combination of disgust and sadness that was deeply painful to me. Hobhouse, in the active part he had to sustain, showed a manly, unaffected feeling." By eleven o'clock Hobhouse had been joined by his co-trustee Hanson and the principal mourners, and outside was a vast assemblage of carriages stretching away into the watching crowds. Presently the hearse moved slowly forward, and carriage by carriage drew up at the door to receive Byron's friends. The first took up George Leigh, Augusta's husband, Hobhouse, Hanson, and a representative of another branch of the Byron family; the second and third, Stanhope, Kinnaird, Sir Francis Burdett, member with Hobhouse for Westminster, Michael Bruce, who had been with Byron in Greece in 1810, and two others; into the fourth carriage stepped Rogers, Campbell, and Moore, with Orlando the Greek Deputy; and into the fifth Bruno, another doctor, and a Mr. Holmes, presumably the painter who had done the miniatures of Byron. A Greek sailor came out of the crowd and stood bareheaded by the hearse. Some one asked him who he was, and he said that he had served with

Byron in the Levant. He was offered a place in one of the carriages, but he said that he would prefer to walk, and he kept his place without another word throughout the morning. Gamba also was present it is to be supposed, but he is not mentioned by Hobhouse or in a full contemporary newspaper report that we have consulted.[1] Then followed a long stream of empty carriages, forty-seven according to Hobhouse and nearly a hundred according to the newspaper, sent among others by the Duke of Sussex, the Duke of Bedford, Lords Lansdowne, Carlisle, Grey, Jersey, Cowper, Holland, Melbourne, and also by Hobhouse's father and John Murray. The procession moved along Parliament Street, Cockspur Street, Haymarket, Coventry Street, Princes Street, Gerrard Street, Dean Street, and down Oxford Street towards Tottenham Court Road. At that moment a young man of twenty-one was walking by this point after a stormy scene with his publisher. This was George Borrow, and in the thirty-ninth chapter of *Lavengro* may be found the following passage:

Happening to cast my eye around, it suddenly occurred to me that something uncommon was expected; people were standing in groups on the pavement—the upstairs windows of the houses were thronged with faces, especially those of women, and many of the shops were partly, and not a few entirely, closed. What could be the reason of all this? All at once I bethought me that this street of Oxford was no other than the far-famed Tyburn way . . . but then I remembered that Tyburn tree had long since been cut down. . . . Just then I heard various voices say "There it comes!" and all heads were turned up Oxford Street, down which a hearse was slowly coming; nearer and nearer it drew; presently it was just opposite the place where I was standing, when, turning to the left, it proceeded slowly along Tottenham Court Road. Immediately behind the hearse were three or four mourning coaches, full of people, some of which, from the partial glimpse which I caught of them, appeared to be foreigners; behind these came a very long train of splendid carriages, all of which, without one exception, were empty. "Whose body is in that hearse?" said I to a dapper-looking individual, seemingly a shopkeeper, who stood beside me on the pavement, looking at the procession.

[1] In an instructive pamphlet, *Byron painted by his Compeers*, 1869.

"The mortal relics of Lord Byron," said the dapper-looking individual, mouthing his words and smirking—"the illustrious poet, which have just been brought from Greece, and are being conveyed to the family vault in [Nottingham]shire." "An illustrious poet, was he?" said I. "Beyond all criticism," said the dapper man; "all we of the rising generation are under incalculable obligation to Byron; I myself, in particular, have reason to say so; in all my correspondence my style is formed on the Byronic model." [And Borrow continues:] The sun, which for many days past had hidden its face in the clouds, shone out that morn with wonderful brilliancy, flaming upon the black hearse with its tall ostrich plumes, the mourning coaches, and the long train of aristocratic carriages which followed behind.

And Allan Cunningham, who seems to have been another spectator, writes in a paper contributed long afterwards to *Hogg's Weekly Instructor*: "In conformity to a singular practice of the great, a long train of their empty carriages followed the mourning coaches—mocking the dead with idle state, and impeding the honester sympathy of the crowd with barren pageantry. Where were the owners of these machines of sloth and luxury—where were the men of rank among whose dark pedigrees Lord Byron threw the light of his genius, and lent the brows of nobility a halo to which they were strangers? Where were the great Whigs? Where were the illustrious Tories?"

The procession arrived shortly after noon at St. James's Chapel in the Hampstead Road, and here the long train of carriages turned back while the hearse, stripped of its decorations, which were packed for use again later, increased its pace as it set out on its three-day journey to Nottingham. Passing through Camden Town and Kentish Town, still followed by a large crowd, from which people fell out as they got far from their homes, while others joined it as each new suburb or hamlet was reached, the cortège came out on to the Great North Road, and on the first evening it arrived at Welwyn, where it rested for the night. As the hearse drew into the town it was met by a stranger on horseback. He stopped to ask whose funeral it was. While he did so, his wife, who was riding behind him, came up. She found her husband much agitated, and enquired the cause.

Whose funeral was it? He would not tell her. But, with a sudden suspicion, she insisted, and at length learnt the truth. She never recovered from the shock of finding herself thus on the roadside, wholly unwarned, within an arm's length of Byron's coffin. It was Caroline Lamb.

The next day, Tuesday, church-bells tolling as the body passed through the villages on the road, Higham Ferrers was reached, and on Wednesday, Oakham. On Thursday through the day and night, the last stage of the hundred and twenty miles was completed, and at five o'clock on Friday morning, July 16th, the plumes and furnishings in their places again, the hearse drove slowly into Nottingham. Already a large crowd was assembled at the south end of the town, and as the procession, to which mourning coaches had now again been added, passed along Fishergate, Cartergate, and Carlton Street, the thoroughfares became congested with people. At the Blackmoor's Head Inn, in Pelham Street, the coffin was taken from the hearse to a room prepared to receive it, and until ten o'clock the public was admitted in groups of twenty to walk round the catafalque and out again. The great market-place was now filled with a waiting throng, the house-tops and windows crowded, many thousands of people appearing dressed in mourning. And over all was silence and perfect order.

At a quarter to eleven the procession moved out from Nottingham for Hucknall Torkard. First went two mounted constables, followed by two bailiffs, three other attendants, twenty-six of Lord Rancliffe's tenantry from Bunny Park where Byron used to shoot as a young man, and two mutes, all on horseback, "a large plume of black Feathers, carried on a man's head, with two supporters," on foot, and four cloakmen, mounted. Then came the State Horse, led by two pages, the rider carrying on his arms a crimson velvet cushion, on which was Byron's coronet. The hearse, "adorned with twelve large sable plumes, drawn by six beautiful black horses, each having a plume of feathers on its head," followed, and then a coach and six with an urn containing Byron's heart. The chief mourners, Leigh, Wildman, the new owner of Newstead Abbey, Hobhouse and Hanson, also in a

coach and six, came next, and the contingent from Missolonghi in a third. Again two coaches, each again drawn by six horses, containing the Mayor of Nottingham, two Aldermen, the Sheriff, the Town Clerk, and other Councillors, all in full mourning with scarves and hatbands. The procession, a quarter of a mile in length, was brought up by sundry other carriages, the pall-bearers, and finally, "forty Gentlemen on horseback, two and two." Leaving by the Mansfield Road, attended all the way by a great body of people, the funeral party took four hours to cover the eight miles to Hucknall, and it was not until half-past three that the watchers in and round the little church saw the procession approaching. It filed into the church, the Rev. Mr. Nixon began to read the service to a suffocating crowd of mourners in an atmosphere thick with plumes and sable broadcloth, and at four minutes to four the bearer of the coronet took his place at the entrance to the open vault. The service proceeded as the coffin and urn were removed and borne down the steps. Hobhouse tells us that he felt "stunned and unable to lament." Fletcher broke down in utter desolation. At ten minutes past four the ceremony was over, and five minutes later, as the mourners drifted away, the vault was closed.[1]

4

And so Byron put off his mortality and took on immortality; more surely, we may feel in our empirical moods, than is the lot of most men. We know how little is an age in the light of eternity and, to use Byron's words again, all that. But to remain a vivid personality and a debated poet for a hundred years after one's death, with prospect of more hundreds it may be to come, is a destiny that the fates implacably deny to mere cleverness, with all its blandishments. Byron was so easily a mark of censure for any little prudence that passes impeccably

[1] So says one contemporary account, which has the appearance of having been written by an official reporter. Hobhouse says that he "was told afterwards" that it was not closed until next morning. The corporation of Nottingham asked Hobhouse to stay to receive the freedom of the city; but he felt in no mood for it, and declined.

through obscurity into oblivion. He did so clearly fail to subject his dross to the fires that had been so lavishly given him to light in his talents and genius. Men so liberally endowed must, it should be allowed, meet the responsibilities of life more securely than ever Byron did. This waywardness, this failure to come into line, this refusal to accept the rulings of the court, are to be discouraged as subversive of the common welfare. And then Byron was demonstrably a slovenly poet; he wrote so much that was a waste of paper, so little that the pedants of verse do not feel that they could improve.

And what then? The more we know him, the more confident are we that we could augment most of the indictments brought by his easy detractors, since at every step to know him better is the more to discover his frailties, and his poor little compromises in the conflict that was his life. And yet, choosing the words unscrupulously, the more we know him the more we love him, and the more we respect the splendidly vital force that directed and at last consumed him. His faults were so spectacular, his defences so carelessly designed, that he has become a text for every amateur pulpiteer. Nevertheless, we do not discover that he ever failed in courage when a persecuted cause had to be supported, that he ever betrayed a friend, that he ever feared to speak the truth as he saw it. There was no tyranny in the world that could corrupt him, and he stayed a long and desperate course without once showing a sign of capitulating. And, as for his poetry, it so very cheerfully survives alike the scrutiny of the pedants and its own errors and limitations.

Also we must remember that Byron, more than any poet but Shakespeare, has given our poetry distinction in the mind of Europe. His broad, rather generalised, emotion, and his idiomatic lucidity, or, if we like to put it so, his indifference to those subtleties of association that place so much poetry beyond exact translation, have no doubt made him far more easily accessible than most of our poets to foreign readers. But to account for his distinction is still to recognise it. Byron is, little as it may please some fastidious but barren minds, a universal figure in

modern European literature. And, by his last days, he became for ever a figure in modern European history also. Without Greece he would have taken an eminent place in the English chronicles of his time, but the adventure at Missolonghi profoundly affected the scope of his reputation. In that drenching spring he was able to distinguish clearly between the squalor, the petty quarrels, the frustrations that beset him, and the cause for which he was submitting to this daily vexation of body and mind, and we should be able to distinguish between them too. Full of incredibly sordid detail as those days are when we live them over again from minute to minute, miserable and ineffectual as his death appears in terms of Bruno's antispasmodic draughts and Parry's furtive recommendation of the brandy-bottle, considered in their right spiritual bearing the days and the death take on a common splendour. And it is a splendour that Greece has never forgotten. Burns in Scotland and Byron in Greece have seized and held the imagination of a people as no other writers have done in the modern world. Byron in Greece, among all classes of the people, in the centres of culture and in remote villages, has become a deeply rooted national sentiment. To disparage such an achievement is to be very inconsiderable. It may have been Byron's luck, but it is a luck that the gods bestow only on such mortals as they mean us to praise. To be the inspiration of a race as Byron has been, and yet is, implies an indulgence of fortune such as falls to few men in the ages; but it is seemly in us to be unsophisticated about the favour when it is granted, and not to be too nice in our enthusiasms.

5

On April 19th, 1924, a gathering of Greeks and English men and women stood listening at Missolonghi to the President of the University of Athens as he told them how this English poet had helped to put Greece again among the nations. It was not raining now, but the innumerable frogs still croaked across the surrounding marshes. In the clear evening air a hundred little hawks circled and chattered close above the speaker and

his audience, settling on the red tiles of the low roofs about them, and diving again into the courtyard that was the site of Byron's house. It was just a quarter past six again, a hundred years later. Along the flat shore, melancholy even in the sunlight, Greek artillery were firing thirty-seven minute-guns. Everybody present knew that here was no simulated emotion, knew it the more from a strange sense of the passion with which the whole of Greece was watching the passing of this moment. The occasion had its humours, just as had all the great occasions of Byron's life. But it was vital, deeply moving, this salutation from a people to the foreign poet who a hundred years ago had come to their deliverance, and spared nothing, not even his life. Greece remembered, had always remembered, always would. And still, even at the moment, it was heartening to remember also that Byron was an Englishman, and an English poet who in the very ardour of his estrangement had written:

I've taught me other tongues—and in strange eyes
Have made me not a stranger; to the mind
Which is itself, no changes bring surprise;
Nor is it harsh to make, nor hard to find
A country with—aye, or without mankind;
Yet was I born where men are proud to be,—
Not without cause; and should I leave behind
The inviolate Island of the sage and free
And seek me out a home by a remoter sea,

Perhaps I loved it well; and should I lay
My ashes in a soil which is not mine,
My Spirit shall resume it—if we may
Unbodied choose a sanctuary. I twine
My hopes of being remembered in my line
With my land's language: if too fond and far
These aspirations in their scope incline,—
If my Fame should be, as my fortunes are,
Of hasty growth and blight, and dull Oblivion bar

My name from out the temple where the dead
Are honoured by the Nations—let it be—
And light the Laurels on a loftier head!
And be the Spartan's epitaph on me—

"Sparta hath many a worthier son than he."
Meantime I seek no sympathies, nor need—
The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree
I planted,—they have torn me,—and I bleed;
I should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed.

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